

The LONDON

OCTOBER

4½



THE ELECTRIC VAMPIRE

Abrilliant Story founded on

Scientific Fact BY F.H. POWER

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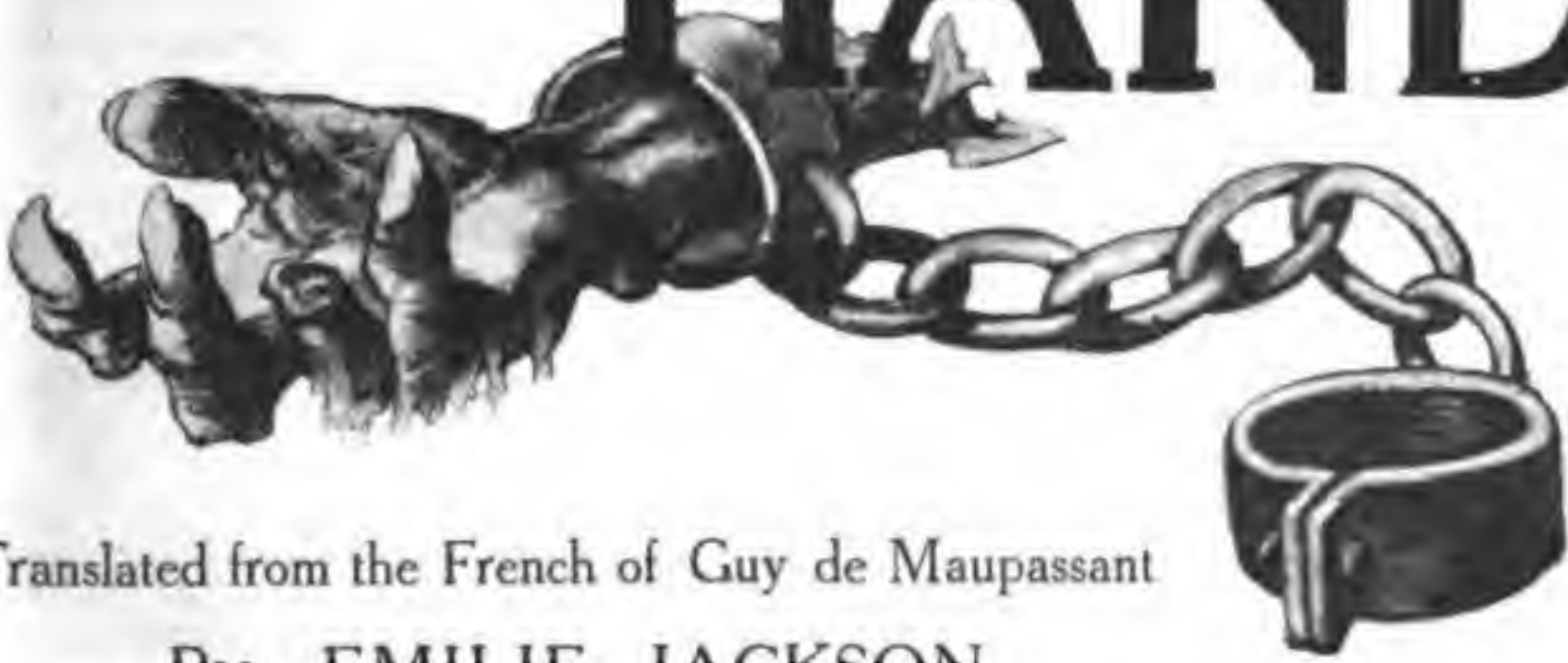
TRUE GHOST
STORIES

• •
SPIRIT
PHOTOGRAPHY

Stories by
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Et. Et.



THE HAND



Translated from the French of Guy de Maupassant

By EMILIE JACKSON

WE were all seated round Monsieur Bermutier, the magistrate, who was giving us his opinion on the affair at St. Cloud. The inexplicable crime had convulsed Paris for a whole month, yet no single being had solved the mystery.

Upright, with his back to the fireplace, Monsieur Bermutier held forth, marshalled proofs, and discussed divers opinions, but he came to no conclusion.

Several of the women present had risen from their seats to be nearer to him; and they remained standing, their eyes fixed on the clean-shaven lips whence issued such words of grave import. They thrilled and shuddered, devoured with curiosity and with that avid and insatiable love of the horrible that haunts their souls and tortures them like hunger.

One, paler than the others, broke the silence:

"It is terrible! It is almost supernatural! We shall never know anything about it."

The magistrate turned to her:

"You are right, madame; it is quite probable we shall never know anything about it. But the word 'supernatural' that you used a moment ago has no meaning in this case. We have before us a crime very ably conceived and very ably carried out, so wrapped in mystery that we are unable to dissociate it from the impenetrable circumstances surrounding it. But in times

gone by I had to follow up a case where the fantastic element was really intermingled. We had to abandon it, however, as no one was able to throw any light on it."

Breathlessly, and as if with one voice, several of the ladies exclaimed:

"Oh, do tell us about it!"

Monsieur Bermutier smiled gravely, as befits a magistrate, and continued:

You must not think for a moment that I fancied there was any element of the supernatural in this case. I am no believer in the abnormal. But if, instead of using the word "supernatural" to explain what we do not understand, we were to use the word "inexplicable," it would be far better. At any rate, in the tale I am about to relate to you it was mainly the surrounding circumstances, the preparatory circumstances, so to speak, which affected me. Briefly, these are the facts:

In those days I was resident magistrate at Ajaccio, a little white town nestled on the borders of a beautiful gulf, and surrounded by high mountains.

What I had principally to deal with were cases of vendetta. There were some that were really magnificent, others excessively dramatic, savage, and again heroic. The most splendid subjects of revenge that a man may dream of—time-honoured hatreds momentarily appeased, perhaps, but never really extinguished—abominably cunning

tricks, murder swelling into massacre, and actions almost noble.

For two years I heard of nothing but the price of blood, of the terrible Corsican law which enforces vengeance on the evildoer, to be borne by his descendants and near relations. I had seen old men, children, and cousins with their throats cut. My brain teemed with such happenings.

One day I heard that an Englishman had rented a little villa on the edge of the gulf for several years. He had brought a French manservant with him, picked up on the way at Marseilles. Soon everyone was talking of this queer foreigner, who lived alone in his house, leaving it only to hunt and fish. He never spoke to anyone, never entered the town, and practised shooting every morning for two or three hours with pistol and rifle.

Stories were rife about him. Some made out he was a great personage who had fled his country for political reasons, others affirmed that he was in hiding for having committed a terrible crime. They even cited the particularly horrible details.

In my position as magistrate I wanted to gain some information about this man, but I failed to learn anything at all. He gave his name as Sir John Rowell.

So I had to be content to watch him closely, but, to speak candidly, my attention was called to nothing suspicious about him. However, as the rumours about him continued, swelled, and became common talk, I resolved to see him for myself; and I set about shooting regularly in his neighbourhood.

For a long while I awaited an opportunity. At last it came, in the shape of a partridge which I shot and killed under the Englishman's nose. My dog brought it to me. Taking the bird, I went and excused myself for my want of manners, and begged Sir John Rowell to accept the dead bird.

He was a huge man, red-haired and red-bearded, very tall, very big, a placid and polite Hercules. He had none of that so-called British stiffness; and he thanked me warmly for my small civility in French with an accent from over the water. After a month had gone by we had spoken five or six times together.

At length one evening as I passed his door I saw him sitting in his garden, astride a chair, smoking a pipe. I bowed, and he invited me to come in and drink a glass of beer. I did not wait to be asked twice.

He received me with the meticulous courtesy of an Englishman, spoke warmly of France and Corsica, declaring that he liked both country and seashore extremely.

Then cautiously I put him some leading questions under the guise of a lively interest in his life and doings. He answered without any embarrassment, told me that he had travelled much in Africa, India, and America, and added, laughing:

"Oh, I had many adventures!"

Then I talked sport, and he gave me some exceedingly curious details gathered in pursuit of the hippopotamus, the tiger, the elephant, and even the gorilla.

"Those are all formidable beasts?" said I.

He smiled, and replied:

"Oh, no; man was the worst!"

And he laughed outright, with the hearty laugh of a satisfied Englishman.

"Man was often my game," he added.

Then he spoke of arms, and invited me to come in and look at some rifles of different makes. His sitting-room was hung with black—black silk embroidered with gold. Large yellow flowers sprawled over the dark stuff, and shone like fire. The stuff was Japanese, he told me.

In the centre of the largest panel something extraordinary caught my eye. A black object stood out in relief against a square of red velvet. I went up to it. It was a hand—a man's hand! No bleached and well-cleaned skeleton-hand, but a dried-up black hand, with its yellow nails, its bared muscles, and traces of dried blood—blood smeared like mud on the bones—cut off cleanly as if by a hatchet in the middle of the forearm.

Round the wrist a heavy iron chain was riveted, welded to this unclean member, and holding it fast to the wall with a ring strong enough to hold an elephant in leash.

"What is that?" I asked.

"He was my deadliest foe," replied the Englishman quietly. "It came from America. It was cut off with a sword, the skin torn away with a flint, and then dried in the sun for a week. A good stroke of work on my part."

I touched this remnant of humanity; it must have belonged to a colossus. The exaggeratedly long fingers were attached by tremendous tendons, which bore scraps of skin here and there. The hand was horrible to look at, skinned thus; it made one's



IN A RAGE WHICH APPROACHED MADNESS, HE WOULD OFTEN TAKE UP HIS WHIP AND FURIOUSLY BEAT THE SHRIVELLED HAND CHAINED TO THE WALL.

thoughts turn instinctively to some savage and ferocious form of revenge.

"He must have been a very strong man," said I.

"Yes," answered the Englishman calmly; "but I proved the stronger. I put on that chain to hold him fast."

Thinking he was speaking in fun, I said:

"But that chain is of no use now: the hand will not try and escape."

"It has always wanted to go; that chain was necessary," gravely replied Sir John Rowell.

I looked at him with a rapid glance. Had I to deal with a madman, or did he but joke in very bad taste?

His face remained impenetrable, tranquil, and good-natured. I spoke of other things. I admired his guns. I observed, however, that three loaded revolvers lay about the room, as if this man lived in constant dread of being attacked.

I went to see him several times again; then I went no more. We had become used to his presence; he had become a matter of indifference to all.

A whole year slipped by. Then one morning towards the end of November my servant woke me, telling me that Sir John Rowell had been murdered during the night.

Half an hour later I entered the Englishman's house, accompanied by the Commissioner and the Chief-Inspector of Police. Overcome with grief, and half distracted, the manservant stood crying in the doorway. At first I suspected the man, but he was innocent. We were never able to find the murderer.

The first thing I saw on entering Sir John's sitting-room was the body lying on its back in the middle of the room. The waistcoat was torn; one sleeve hung in ribbons; there was every sign that a terrible struggle had taken place.

The Englishman had died of strangulation. His black and swollen face, terrifying, seemed to wear an expression of awful fear. He held something between his clenched teeth; and the throat, pierced with five holes that might have been made with fangs of iron, was covered with blood.

A doctor had joined us. Lengthily he

examined the marks of fingers on the flesh, and then queerly remarked :

"One might think he had been strangled by a skeleton."

A shudder ran down my spine, and I looked towards the wall at the spot where I had seen the horrible skinned hand. It was no longer there. The chain hung down, broken.

Then I stooped over the dead man, and found between the tense jaws a finger from the hand that had disappeared, cut, or rather sawn, by the teeth just at the second joint.

Inquiries were instituted. Nothing was discovered. Neither door, window, nor furniture had been tampered with. The two watchdogs had not been aroused.

Here, briefly, is the manservant's testimony : For a month past his master had appeared restless. He had received many letters, burnt as soon as received.

In a rage which approached madness he would often take up his whip and furiously beat the shrivelled hand chained to the wall, and which had been removed, no one knew how, at the hour of the crime.

He went to bed very late, and locked himself in with care. He always had firearms within reach of his hand. Often in the night he was heard speaking with raised voice, as if he were quarrelling with someone.

That night, by chance, he had made no sound ; and it was only on coming to open the windows that the servant had discovered Sir John lying murdered. He suspected no one.

I told the officers of the law all I knew of the dead man, and a minute inquiry was

instituted all over the island. They discovered nothing.

Now, it happened one night three months after the crime had taken place I had a most horrible nightmare. I thought I saw the hand, the sinister hand, run like a scorpion or a spider along my curtains and walls. Three times did I wake, three times did I fall asleep ; three times did I see the hideous thing gallop round my room, moving its fingers like feet.

The following day they brought it to me, found in the cemetery on the grave of Sir John Rowell, who had been laid there as we failed to discover his family. The first finger was missing. That, ladies, is my story. I know no more.

The women were all shuddering, terror-struck, and pale.

"But," exclaimed one, "that cannot be the end ; that is no explanation ! We shall none of us close our eyes to-night if you do not tell us what you think occurred."

The magistrate smiled as he answered reprovingly :

"For my part, madame, I shall certainly spoil your horror-filled dreams, for I merely think that the rightful owner of the hand was not dead, and that he came to seek it with the one left to him. But I was unable to find out how he went about it. That was a kind of vendetta."

One of the women murmured :

"No ; it could not have been that !"

"I told you that my explanation would not satisfy you," said the magistrate, still smiling.



ROSE ROSE

BY BARRY PAIN

A STUDY IN PSYCHOLOGY.

SEFTON stepped back from his picture. "Rest now, please," he said.

Miss Rose Rose, his model, threw the striped blanket around her, stepped down from the throne, and crossed the studio. She seated herself on the floor near the big stove. For a few moments Sefton stood motionless, looking critically at his work. Then he laid down his palette and brushes and began to roll a cigarette. He was a man of forty, thick-set, round-faced, with a reddish moustache turned fiercely upwards. He flung himself down in an easy-chair, and smoked in silence till silence seemed ungracious.

"Well," he said, "I've got the place hot enough for you to-day, Miss Rose."

"You 'ave indeed," said Miss Rose.

"I bet it's nearer eighty than seventy."

The cigarette-smoke made a blue haze in the hot, heavy air. He watched it undulating, curving, melting.

As he watched it Miss Rose continued her observations. The trouble with these studios was the draughts. With a strong east wind, same as yesterday, you might have the stove red-hot, and yet never get the place, so to speak, warm. It is possible to talk commonly without talking like a coster, and Miss Rose achieved it. She did not always neglect the aspirate. She never quite substituted the third vowel for the first. She rather enjoyed long words.

She was beautiful from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot; and few models have good feet. Every pose she took was graceful. She was the daughter of a model, and had been herself a model from childhood. In consequence, she knew her work well and did it well. On one occasion, when sitting for the great Merion, she had kept the same pose, without a rest, for three consecutive hours. She was proud of that. Naturally she stood in the first rank among models, was most in demand, and made the most money.

Her fault was that she was slightly capricious; you could not absolutely depend upon her. On a wintry morning, when every hour of daylight was precious, she might keep her appointment, she might be an hour or two late, or she might stay away altogether. Merion himself had suffered from her, had sworn never to employ her again, and had gone back to her.

Sefton, as he watched the blue smoke, found that her common accent jarred on him. It even seemed to make it more difficult for him to get the right presentation of the "Aphrodite" that she was helping him to paint. One seemed to demand a poetical and cultured soul in so beautiful a body. Rose Rose was not poetical nor cultured; she was not even businesslike and educated.

Half an hour of silent and strenuous work followed. Then Sefton growled that he could not see any longer.

"We'll stop for to-day," he said. Miss Rose Rose retired behind the screen. Sefton opened a window and both ventilators, and rolled another cigarette. The studio became rapidly cooler.

"To-morrow, at nine?" he called out.

"I've got some way to come," came the voice of Miss Rose from behind the screen. "I could be here by a quarter past."

"Right," said Sefton, as he slipped on his coat.

When Rose Rose emerged from the screen she was dressed in a blue serge costume, with a picture-hat. As it was her business in life to be beautiful, she never wore corsets, high heels, nor pointed toes. Such abnegation is rare among models.

"I say, Mr. Sefton," said Rose, "you were to settle at the end of the sittings, but——"

"Oh, you don't want any money, Miss Rose. You're known to be rich."

"Well, what I've got is in the Post Office, and I don't want to touch it. And I've got



**Miss Rose Rose
threw the striped
blanket around her.**

ROSE ROSE.

some shopping I must do before I go home."

Sefton pulled out his sovereign-case hesitatingly.

"This is all very well, you know," he said.

"I know what you are thinking, Mr. Sefton. You think I don't mean to come to-morrow. That's all Mr. Merion, now, isn't it? He's always saying things about me. I'm not going to stick it. I'm going to 'ave it out with 'im."

"He recommended you to me. And I'll tell you what he said, if you won't repeat it. He said that I should be lucky if I got you, and that I'd better chain you to the studio."

"And all because I was once late—with a good reason for it, too. Besides, what's once? I suppose he didn't 'appen to tell you how often he's kept me waiting."

"Well, here you are, Miss Rose. But you'll really be here in time to-morrow, won't you? Otherwise the thing will have got too tacky to work into."

"You needn't worry about that," said Miss Rose eagerly. "I'll be here, whatever happens, by a quarter past nine. I'll be here if I die first! There, is that good enough for you? Good-afternoon, and thank you, Mr. Sefton."

"Good-afternoon, Miss Rose. Let me manage that door for you—the key goes a bit stiffly."

Sefton came back to his picture. In spite of Miss Rose's vehement assurances he felt by no means sure of her, but it was difficult for him to refuse any woman anything, and impossible for him to refuse to pay her what he really owed. He scrawled in charcoal some directions to the charwoman who would come in the morning. She was, from his point of view, a prize charwoman—one who could, and did, wash brushes properly, one who understood the stove, and would, when required, refrain from sweeping. He picked up his hat and went out. He walked the short distance from his studio to his bachelor flat, looked over an evening paper as he drank his tea, and then changed his clothes and took a cab to the club for dinner. He played one game of billiards after dinner, and then went home. His picture was very much in his mind. He wanted to be up fairly early in the morning, and he went to bed early.

He was at his studio by half-past eight. The stove was lighted, and he piled more coke on it. His "Aphrodite" seemed to have a somewhat mocking expression. It was a

little, technical thing, to be corrected easily. He set his palette and selected his brushes. An attempt to roll a cigarette revealed the fact that his pouch was empty. It still wanted a few minutes to nine. He would have time to go up to the tobacconist at the corner. In case Rose Rose arrived while he was away, he left the studio door open. The tobacconist was also a newsagent, and he bought a morning paper. Rose would probably be twenty minutes late at the least, and this would be something to occupy him.

But on his return he found his model already stepping on to the throne.

"Good-morning, Miss Rose. You're a lady of your word." He hardly heeded the murmur which came to him as a reply. He threw his cigarette into the stove, picked up his palette, and got on excellently. The work was absorbing. For some time he thought of nothing else. There was no relaxing on the part of the model—no sign of fatigue. He had been working for over an hour, when his conscience smote him. "We'll have a rest now, Miss Rose," he said cheerily. At the same moment he felt human fingers drawn lightly across the back of his neck, just above the collar. He turned round with a sudden start. There was nobody there. He turned back again to the throne. Rose Rose had vanished.

With the utmost care and deliberation he put down his palette and brushes. He said in a loud voice, "Where are you, Miss Rose?" For a moment or two silence hung in the hot air of the studio.

He repeated his question and got no answer. Then he stepped behind the screen, and suddenly the most terrible thing in his life happened to him. He knew that his model had never been there at all.

There was only one door out to the back street in which his studio was placed, and that door was now locked. He unlocked it, put on his hat, and went out. For a minute or two he paced the street, but he had got to go back to the studio.

He went back, sat down in the easy-chair, lit a cigarette, and tried for a plausible explanation. Undoubtedly he had been working very hard lately. When he had come back from the tobacconist's to the studio he had been in the state of expectant attention, and he was enough of a psychologist to know that in that state you are especially likely to see what you expect to see. He was not conscious of anything

abnormal in himself. He did not feel ill, or even nervous. Nothing of the kind had ever happened to him before. The more he considered the matter, the more definite became his state. He was thoroughly frightened. With a great effort he pulled himself together and picked up the newspaper. It was certain that he could do no more work for that day, anyhow. An ordinary, commonplace newspaper would restore him. Yes, that was it. He had been too much wrapped up in the picture. He had simply supposed the model to be there.

He was quite unconvinced, of course, and merely trying to convince himself. As an artist, he knew that for the last hour or more he had been getting the most delicate modelling right from the living form before him. But he did his best, and read the newspaper assiduously. He read of tariff, protection, and of a new music-hall star. Then his eye fell on a paragraph headed "Motor Fatalities."

He read that Miss Rose, an artist's model, had been knocked down by a car in the Fulham Road about seven o'clock on the previous evening; that the owner of the car had stopped and taken her to the hospital, and that she had expired within a few minutes of admission.

He rose from his place and opened a large pocket-knife. There was a strong impulse upon him, and he felt it to be a mad impulse, to slash the canvas to rags. He stopped before the picture. The face smiled at him with a sweetness that was scarcely earthly.

He went back to his chair again. "I'm not used to this kind of thing," he said aloud. A board creaked at the far end of the studio. He jumped up with a start of horror. A few minutes later he had left the studio, and locked the door behind him. His common sense was still with him. He ought to go to a specialist. But the picture—

"What's the matter with Sefton?" said Devigne one night at the club after dinner.

"Don't know that anything's the matter with him," said Merion. "He hasn't been here lately."

"I saw him the last time he was here, and he seemed pretty queer. Wanted to let me his studio."

"It's not a bad studio," said Merion dispassionately.

"He's got rid of it now, anyhow. He's got a studio out at Richmond, and the deuce of a lot of time he must waste getting there and back. Besides, what does he do about models?"

"That's a point I've been wondering about myself," said Merion. "He'd got Rose Rose for his 'Aphrodite,' and it looked as if it might be a pretty good thing when I saw it. But, as you know, she died. She was troublesome in some ways, but, taking her all round, I don't know where to find anybody as good to-day. What's Sefton doing about it?"

"He hasn't got a model at all at present. I know that for a fact, because I asked him."

"Well," said Merion, "he may have got the thing on further than I thought he would in the time. Some chaps can work from memory all right, though I can't do it myself. He's not chucked the picture, I suppose?"

"No; he's not done that. In fact, the picture's his excuse now, if you want him to go anywhere and do anything. But that's not it: the chap's altogether changed. He used to be a genial sort of bounder—bit tyrannical in his manner, perhaps—thought he knew everything. Still, you could talk to him. He was sociable. As a matter of fact, he did know a good deal. Now it's quite different. If you ever do see him—and that's not often—he's got nothing to say to you. He's just going back to his work. That sort of thing."

"You're too imaginative," said Merion. "I never knew a man who varied less than Sefton. Give me his address, will you? I mean his studio. I'll go and look him up one morning. I should like to see how that 'Aphrodite's' getting on. I tell you it was promising; no nonsense about it."

One sunny morning Merion knocked at the door of the studio at Richmond. He heard the sound of footsteps crossing the studio, then Sefton's voice rang out. "Who's there?"

"Merion. I've travelled miles to see the thing you call a picture."

"I've got a model."

"And what does that matter?" asked Merion.

"Well, I'd be awfully glad if you'd come



He turned round with a sudden start. There was nobody there.

ROSE ROSE.

back in an hour. We'd have lunch together somewhere."

"Right," said Merion sardonically. "I'll come back in about seven million hours. Wait for me."

He went back to London and his own studio in a state of fury. Sefton had never been a man to pose. He had never put on side about his work. He was always willing to show it to old and intimate friends whose judgment he could trust; and now, when the oldest of his friends had travelled down to Richmond to see him, he was told to come back in an hour, and that they might then lunch together!

"This lets me out," said Merion savagely.

But he always speaks well of Sefton nowadays. He maintains that Sefton's "Aphrodite" would have been a success anyhow. The suicide made a good deal of talk at the time, and a special attendant was necessary to regulate the crowds round it, when, as directed by his will, the picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy. He was found in his studio many hours after his death; and he had scrawled on a blank canvas, much as he left his directions to his charwoman: "I have finished it, but I can't stand any more." **BARRY PAIN.**



THE END OF THE "COMET'S" TAIL.

Paterfamilias: "James, Miss Mary says that she has just been viewing the comet. Now, James, just take Grip round to the front door, and see what sort of comet that tail belongs to."

THE LONDON MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1910

The Electric Vampire

By F. H. POWER

Illustrated by Philip Baynes



The following story, though of course but a figment of the imagination, is yet founded on fact. Over seventy years ago (in 1836, to be precise), a Mr. Crosse astonished the British Association by reading a paper on electro-crystallisation, in which he described how he obtained living electric insects, called acari, by artificial means—namely, by a voltaic battery, certain acids, and red oxide of iron. His experiments were closely watched by the leading scientists of the day, but Crosse himself gave them up, owing to the excited attitude of a section of the public, who assailed him with much bitterness for carrying out experiments which they considered it a "crime" to make.

I WAS at breakfast when the note reached me. "My dear Charles," it ran,—*"I shall be glad if you can come round to my place to-night, as I have something to show you, which I think will interest you. I have also asked Vane."*

It did not take a moment for me to make up my mind to go. Dr. Vane and I often spent an evening at George Vickers's house. We were bachelors, and as we were all fond of things scientific, the time passed very pleasantly—so pleasantly that very often it was two or three o'clock in the morning before he saw us off his premises.

During the day I found myself speculating as to what our friend intended to show us. I recalled some of the weird and fascinating electrical experiments he had performed in his laboratory. "I bet it's another experiment with electricity," I said to myself, but I was only partly correct.

I arrived at the house about six o'clock,

and found Vane had already arrived, and, as usual, had taken the easiest armchair in which to rest his lean body. Our host, with his ruddy, smiling face, stood with his back to the fireplace.

"I'm glad you have come, Charlie," he said. "You will be able to relieve me from that living mark of interrogation." And he nodded towards the doctor, who sat twirling an imaginary moustache.

"Well, why can't he indicate what he has dragged us round here for?" the doctor asked plaintively. "And fancy having as an excuse that he doesn't want to spoil my appetite for dinner!"

"Eh, what?" I ejaculated.

"Oh, now you are going to start. For goodness' sake find something else to talk about until we have had something to eat," said Vickers, and he suggested aeroplanes.

We let him have his own way, and very soon after sat down to dinner. Our

conversation during the meal would have been dry to many, but it was after our own hearts, and never flagged for a moment. The doctor's speciality was biology. My hobby is chemistry, and it was through an explosion which nearly blinded me that I first made his acquaintance, and subsequently introduced him to Vickers.

At last George leaned back in his chair, and, lighting a cigar, said :

"You fellows, of course, want to know what on earth I am keeping up my sleeve. Before I show you, I want you to listen to this short extract from a series of lectures given by a man named Noad, and published in 1844."

He fetched the book, and read :

"It was in the course of his experiments in electro-crystallisation that that extraordinary insect about which so much public curiosity has been expended, was first noticed by Mr. Crosse."

Here Vickers looked up from the volume, and remarked :

"Mr. Crosse I might say, was a gentleman who stood foremost as one of the individuals in this country who have distinguished themselves by their researches in atmospheric electricity."

He turned to the book again :

"In justice to this talented individual, who was most shamefully and absurdly assailed by some ignorant people on account of this insect, and who underwent much calumny and misrepresentation in consequence of experiments "which in this nineteenth century it seems a crime to have made," I shall give a detailed account of that experiment in which the *Acarus* first made its appearance."

"Here follows," said George, "a minute description of the apparatus Crosse used. Briefly a basin containing practically a saturated solution of soluble silica is placed in a funnel, and a piece of flannel hangs over the side of the basin and acts as a syphon. The liquid falls in drops on a piece of porous red oxide of iron from Vesuvius, kept constantly electrified by a voltaic battery."

Again he turned to the book and read :

"On the fourteenth day from the commencement of the experiment, Mr. Crosse observed through a lens a few small whitish excrescences or nipples projecting from about the middle of the electrified iron, and nearly under the dropping of the fluid above. On the eighteenth day these projections enlarged,

and seven or eight filaments, each of them longer than the excrescence from which it grew, made their appearance on each of the nipples. On the twenty-second day, these appearances were more elevated and distinct; and on the twenty-sixth day each figure assumed the form of a *perfect insect* standing erect on a few bristles which formed its tail. Till this period Mr. Crosse had no notion that these appearances were any other than an incipient mineral formation, but it was not until the twenty-eighth day, when he plainly perceived these little creatures move their legs, that he felt any surprise. In a few days they separated themselves from the stone, and moved about at pleasure. They appeared to feed by suction.' . . . Mr. Crosse adds : '*I have never ventured an opinion as to the cause of their birth* ; and for a very good reason—I was unable to form one.'"

Vickers shut the book up.

"There's a lot more about it, but I think I have read all that is necessary. If either of you would like some more information on those early experiments, you will find it in the '*Transactions of the Electrical Society*.'"

There was silence whilst we puffed at our cigars. At length Dr. Vane said :

"I was under the impression that subsequent experimentalists were not so successful as Mr. Crosse ?"

Vickers smiled enigmatically.

"If you will just come this way, I fancy I shall be able to prove to you that at least one other experimentalist has been fairly successful." And beckoned us to follow him.

I had often been in his laboratory, but to my surprise he led us to a room at the top of the house, and, as he inserted the key, drew our attention to the Yale lock.

"I rely on you chaps to keep to yourselves what I am going to show you, because I am preparing a paper on this experiment, and I want to surprise 'em," he said, and pushed the door open.

Dr. Vane, with an eager look on his face, entered boldly. I followed close behind, and I remember wondering why George, usually so unemotional, appeared to be in a state of suppressed excitement.

And then I saw what it was. May I, a man, be forgiven if I trembled from head to foot !

On a low plain wood table was a sheet of some metal about four feet square. Form a cistern fixed above, and pierced by many



I saw what it was. May I, a man, be forgiven if I trembled from head to foot! (Page 124.)

minute holes, some liquid dropped on the slab incessantly. But these things I barely noticed, for my attention was riveted to the centre of that slab, on which sprawled a creature which I can only liken to an immense spider, its length being about two feet.

Two legs appeared from behind each side of the head, and four longer ones—they must have been nearly as long as the body—at the back. Projecting from its head, where you would expect to find the mouth, was a trunk-like object which went in and out like the trunk of a fly. All over the body about an inch apart long filaments stood out. Its colour was drab, and it was apparently covered with slime. Its eyes were like the eyes of an owl, and never blinked.

We stared at the fearsome object in dead silence.

Vickers was the first to speak.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he said, with a laugh, but the laugh seemed strangely out of place.

I glanced at the doctor. His hands were clenched, and his eyes so wide open that the whites could be seen all round.

"My God, George, what is that thing?" he whispered intensely.

"That, my dear doctor, is the result of years of experimenting. It first became visible to the naked eye five years ago to-day, but it does not appear to have grown during the last six months. It vindicates Crosse absolutely. Don't you think it is superb?"

"Superb? Oh, yes, it's superb!" said the doctor. He kept muttering to himself as he walked round the table, glaring at the thing on it, but from the few words I caught he was not calling it superb or anything like it.

At last his love of biology overcame his repugnance.

"I should like to feel one of those filaments," he said, and stretched out his hand.

Like a flash of lightning Vickers seized his wrist, and his face was the colour of chalk. Dr. Vane looked astonished and hurt.

"I am sorry, doctor, but I forgot to tell you it can give a terrific electric shock," he said apologetically.

Vane looked somewhat scared, but his interest was plainly increased.

"Then it is some sort of relation to the *Gymnotus*, or electric eel of Venezuela?" he asked.

"Or the Torpedo of the Mediterranean," I suggested.

Vickers shrugged his shoulders.

"I only know that poor old Tippoo"—a splendid collie and great favourite of us all—"happened to accompany me to this room yesterday, and poked his nose a bit too near, when he suddenly toppled over dead as a doornail. He was horribly burnt down one side."

Our friend spoke quietly, but it was easy to see he was deeply affected as he related the tragedy.

"That must have startled you," I said.

"Well, no, I cannot say it was a surprise. I received a very nasty shock when it was quite small—perhaps I was not handling it as carefully as I might have. But"—here he turned to that monstrous creature, and actually passed his hand down one of its hairy legs—"but you know who feeds you, don't you, my beauty?"

The thing evidently did know, for that trunk-like object went in and out rapidly. And I might say here that was the only movement we noticed in it that evening.

The startled look on our faces seemed to amuse Vickers.

"It's all right; it knows me. I have watched it grow day by day, and——"

Here the doctor cut in with a question.

"What do you feed the brute on?" he asked.

Vickers hesitated a moment, and looked at us. Then he walked to the other side of the room, and opened a box which had airholes pierced in it.

"The trunk," he explained, "is fitted with two small pointed teeth at the end, and the blood of the victim is gradually sucked out." He anticipated our next question. "No. It does not kill it first," he said, and shut the lid.

The box contained live mice.

It was exactly ten days later that I was sitting with Vane in his study over a game of chess. At least, we were supposed to be playing chess. As a matter of fact, the doctor was again telling me what he thought of our friend's experiment, and the game had languished.

"I tell you it's the greatest discovery ever made—the greatest!" And his fist thumped the table, making the pieces on the board dance again. His eyes shone with excitement, but this died away as his thoughts travelled in a different channel. "But of all the ugly things God ever created——"

He stopped abruptly.

"Do you know," he continued presently, "that Vickers's interesting pet belongs to the family of mites—ticks, as they are popularly called—notwithstanding its extraordinary size? All these creatures are furnished with suckers through which they can draw the juices of the animals on which they are parasitic, and in tropical countries—well, I will just say they are considerably more than annoying, and leave the rest to your imagination. They are small and flat when they first settle themselves on their victim, but they gradually swell and redden, until at last, when they are fully gorged, they are as large as broad-beans, and as easily crushed as ripe gooseberries."

"It seems to me from its mode of formation that George has discovered the link between the inorganic world and the world of life—the link which is indispensable to a complete scheme of evolution; but the great objection to this idea is the creature's obvious complexity——"

My further remarks were interrupted by a knock at the door, and the doctor's maid Emily entered.

"Mr. Vickers's housekeeper would like to speak to you, sir."

I heard Vane's "Ah!" although it was said very softly. I remember my heart was beating at a ridiculous rate, and I tried hard to calm myself as I reflected that probably the old lady had come about her "screws," as she called her rheumatism, and which I knew had been troubling her more than usual.

But Dr. Vane went down the two flights of stairs to his surgery two steps at a time. At the door he turned round and simply nodded to me, and we entered together.

Mrs. Jones, Vickers's housekeeper, was waiting, with her veil pushed up until it looked like a black bandage across her forehead.

"Is it Mr. Vickers?" Vane asked abruptly.

Mrs. Jones never spoke quickly, and she did not intend to be hurried that day. Her reply came slowly, so deliberately that I thought my supply of patience would ebb away long before that simple question was answered.

"Well, sir, I don't know as there is anything the matter with Mr. Vickers, but he ain't had a bite since one o'clock yesterday, and yet I feel certain as he is in the house. He went upstairs——"

I think Mrs. Jones had reason to look astonished, for Dr. Vane, noted for his

precise ways and highly professional manner, dashed to the house-telephone and shouted into the mouthpiece: "Tell John to bring the car round at once! You understand? He is not to delay one moment!" Then he turned to the housekeeper, who stood with her mouth half open, and said rapidly: "You will come with us, and give us further particulars on the road."

What had happened? I dreaded to think of what that upstairs room would reveal to us. The doctor and I looked at each other. Then he placed his hand on my arm.

"Charlie," he whispered, "you can depend on it George has got foul of that monster. I have felt something would happen, ever since he showed it to us, and it looks very much as if that something has happened."

"I pray God we shall not be too late!" I said fervently, but I thought of that Thing, with the never-winking eyes, and shuddered.

"Have you a revolver?" I asked.

He nodded, and left the surgery.

A few moments later the motor arrived. We bundled Mrs. Jones in; and as Vane gave the chauffeur the address, he added: "Drive like hell!" I shall not forget that ride in a hurry, and I am quite sure Mrs. Jones won't. We plied her with questions, but her replies were so incoherent we soon gave it up. She sat with bulging eyes, one hand clutching the side of the car, the other my coat, and every time it bumped over an obstacle she shrieked. More than once I bawled into her ear: "It's all right!" but I might have saved my breath, for she made no sort of variation on her terror-stricken cry: "Stop it! Stop it!"

A scared-looking maid let us in. We brushed past her, and went straight upstairs. Arriving at the door of that room, we stopped and listened, but could detect not the slightest sound. We tried the door—it was locked. So, after all that tearing hurry we were met by a well-built door, and Vickers had the key. We looked at each other in despair, but with Dr. Vane it lasted but a moment, and was succeeded by a look of grim determination.

"He is in there, and we have got to get to him," he said decisively.

"I'll fetch a locksmith: I think that will turn out to be the quickest way out of the difficulty," I said, and was on the point of moving off when the doctor whispered excitedly: "Wait! Listen! He is speaking!"

I tiptoed back to the door, and listened with loudly beating heart, but hardly breathing: there was silence, a long silence, then I heard a voice, but what it said I could not distinguish. It seemed to come from afar off, like a voice on a telephone that had been badly connected up. Vane shook his head.

"Speak up, old man! We can't hear you!" he shouted.

Again we listened, and this time we could just make out the words ". . . key . . . false . . . bottom . . . desk," then all was quiet again.

"Which drawer, and how do you open it?" the doctor asked loudly. But not another sound came from the room, although he repeated the question twice.

Vane turned to me. "That's a piece of luck. I wonder why he had two keys made? Well, we have got to find that duplicate, quick," he said.

We rapidly made our way to Vickers's study, where we knew there was a roller-top desk. We thanked Heaven when we found the door open, and also the desk. It was a beautiful piece of furniture, and the top was rolled back, showing the row of pigeon-holes and small drawers. Tucked in one of the pigeon-holes was a bunch of keys.

"Now, where the dickens is the drawer with the false bottom?" said Vane, and he hurriedly tried to find the keys which fitted the drawers.

Now, investigations of this sort cannot be hurried, and, swearing softly, he demonstrated this fact completely. The swearing grew louder and louder, till, for a moment, I lost sight of the object of the search in amazement at the extent of his vocabulary.

I relieved him of the bunch when he had opened half the drawers. Eventually we unlocked the lot, but although we quickly took a large number of measurements, we could not find the slightest indication of a false bottom to any of them.

Our nerves were in a high state of tension before we entered the study; by this time, mine were in a deplorable condition. The doctor's face was lined with anxiety.

Silently he handed me a poker, and from the wall took down an old Malay kriss, which did duty for an ornament.

"You take the right side of the desk; I'll take the other," I said.

We found the precious key, but the desk—

Again we were at that door upstairs, and, although I turned the lock, I dreaded

pushing it open. The whole business was so uncanny. Was that horrible creature prowling about the room ready to rush at us the moment we entered? How should we find Vickers?

I glanced at Vane. His jaw was set, and he had taken the revolver out of his pocket. The only sounds we could hear were some carts rumbling along the roadway, and the whistling from a train a long way off.

But the business in hand was very real and desperately urgent, and I do not think anyone would have noticed any hesitancy in pushing that door open; yet the next moment we were suddenly struck motionless as a low whisper reached us: "For God's sake, move as quietly as you can!" We entered on tiptoe.

There are some scenes which are stamped on the memory in such a way that they are never forgotten. Years after they can be called to the eye of the mind with wonderful fidelity to detail. The scene which met us was such a one.

A broad beam from the setting sun came through the bottom of one of the windows, where the blind had not been completely drawn, and we saw. Very plainly, too, for the beam fell straight on it.

Vickers lay stretched on his back in the middle of the room, with that grisly Thing straddled across his chest, its sucker buried in his throat. His face and lips were quite bloodless. His eyes were closed, and I could detect no sort of movement.

I looked at Vane. His brows were contracted till they almost met, and his breath came and went through his teeth with a little hissing noise. I reminded him of the revolver ready cocked in his hand.

"Don't be a fool!" he said irritably. "Get some brandy, and, for Heaven's sake, look slippy!"

When I returned he had his fingers on the poor fellow's wrist, and the frown was still on his face, but the revolver was on the box which was pierced with airholes.

I suppose I must have looked puzzled. Vane spoke impatiently, yet his voice was hardly above a whisper.

"Look here: what guarantee is there I should kill this vampire before it had time to discharge its deadly current through George's body? You know as well as I do that creatures low down in the scale of creation take a lot of killing. We can't risk it, and I am sure we can't risk hauling it off."



Then I had an opportunity of witnessing Vane's beautiful nerve, for not till the last trailing filament had left Vickers did he fire. (Page 130.)

The brandy was doing its work, and Vickers must have heard some of our conversation, because his eyes opened, and he said, with a ghost of a smile: "Have you ever seen a leech applied, Charlie?"

I started violently.

"Good heavens! you don't mean to say Vane and I have to hang about with our hands in our pockets doing nothing except speculating whether—whether——"

"Whether I shall be able to stand the drain till it shifts?"

Vickers smiled again as he took the words out of my mouth.

The thought was intolerable; surely there must be some way!

For hours Vane sat waiting. I also was waiting, but on a couch in another room, getting over the effects of a little blood transfusion. "It is very necessary," Vane had said, as he skilfully made the arrangements, so skilfully that the creature was not disturbed. The improved appearance of poor George was my reward.

Wearied in mind and body I fell asleep, and dreamed dreams of men and women I knew, but I gazed at them with horror, for they all had drawn, blanched faces, with great staring eyes, and something with its body across their chests and with head buried at their throats, and they beseeched me by all I held sacred to take it from them, but I was bound by invisible bands. How shall I tell of my agony of mind? I woke with a start, and in a terrible perspiration, and found the doctor looking at me, hollow-eyed and unshaved.

"Nightmare?" he asked. "Where did you want to go, and who wouldn't let you? Steady, steady," he added, as I jumped up and swayed, owing to the floor apparently moving about. As he pointed out, transfusion has no great tendency to make things appear as steady as rocks.

"Has the thing moved?" I asked.

"No," he answered laconically.

We looked at each other in silence. I was hoping he would guess my next question, but I had to ask it.

"How is George?"

"Alive." And I knew from the way he said it that he had told me simply the bare truth and that was all. There was another long silence.

"Oh! can't we do something?" I cried despairingly.

"Yes," replied Vane. "I am going to

do something if that vampire does not move in ten minutes. The point has been reached when the risk is negligible, inasmuch as if it does not move now there will be no necessity of doing anything. I am going to shoot it."

We returned to that chamber of horrors. Poor Vickers looked ghastly, and it did not require a trained eye to see that the end was not far off.

I took my watch out. "Give it five minutes," muttered Vane; and I sat on the box with the airholes, glancing first at the deathlike face of Vickers, then at Vane's set features as he stood stroking his unshaven chin, gazing at our friend.

"Time's up," I said.

The doctor walked gently till he was opposite the creature's head, and dropped on one knee, then lowered the revolver till it was within six inches of its head. His finger was on the trigger when a strange thing occurred: the bloated monster suddenly withdrew its sucker and glared at him as if it knew that its hour of death had arrived. I thought Vane was fascinated by those baleful eyes, for he did not stir as the creature commenced to move towards him.

"Look out!" I shouted, and he sprang back. None too soon, for the thing rushed at him with incredible swiftness.

Then I had an opportunity of witnessing Vane's beautiful nerve, for not until the last trailing filament had left Vickers did he fire. I saw his finger press the trigger. The next instant a terrific report shook the building, and my hands flew up to my eyes to shut out that terrible blinding flash. Women's screams, mingled with noises as if giant hands were tearing the house to pieces, floated up from below.

The sound of someone groaning made me rouse myself.

Vane lay face downwards in an immense pool of blood, his head hanging over a ragged hole in the floor. I thanked Heaven fervently when I found that he had only been stunned by the vast charge of static electricity the creature had suddenly let loose. Like a flash of lightning the charge had struck the floor, bursting it open, then torn its way through the house.

We turned to Vickers. Vane felt his pulse.

"I will save him," he said. And he did.

F. H. POWER.

THE · STRANGE · CASE · OF VALENTINE · CLARKE

By
Mark Kissing

Illustrated by
Gilbert Holiday



THE Coroner's study looked very cosy—so at least thought the Coroner's Officer who had called to see him on important business that night. The bright fire, lounge-chairs, the reading-lamp, the bookshelves and heavy carpet gave it an inviting appearance. As a step sounded on the threshold he drew himself up, and saluted as the Coroner himself entered.

"Another case, Edwards?" inquired the Coroner.

"Yes, sir. Case o' shootin', sir," replied the officer. "Straightforward case, I think, sir. Not give us much trouble, I should say. Young feller blowed out his brains. Height, five-foot-ten; fair, clean-shaven, well dressed; gold watch. Age, about twenty-three. No papers of identification, 'cept his letter addressed to you, sir. So I brought it right away."

The Coroner held out his hand for the letter in question, a long envelope which proved to contain a closely written letter.

"H'm! Another human document, Edwards. Any idea of the cause of suicide?"

"No, sir; no evidence as yet. Shouldn't say as it was want o' money, with the watch. Worth a hundred at least, we reckon."

"Very well," said the Coroner, "sit down, Edwards, and try one of these cigars. I'll just fill my pipe, and then read the document."

This is what the Coroner read:

Mr. Coroner,—You get many "human documents" I am sure laid before you. Whether "human" exactly applies to my case I will leave it to you to judge. One thing I am confident about is this—I am as sane as you are. I do not suffer from hallucinations. In spite of this, I suppose there is no doubt that the jury will return the usual verdict of "suicide while of

unsound mind." If they do I regret it, not for myself, but because, much as I dislike throwing the limelight on myself, I want the utmost publicity given to my case so that it may act as a deterrent to others.

In an hour or two after I have finished the task of putting on paper some most extraordinary records respecting my career, I shall probably be lying in the Mayfair mortuary, and not a pleasant sight, either. Ugh!

Suicide is a beastly business at the best, and anyone with a sense of decency is filled with shame at the thought of the trouble it gives to unoffending officials and others. I will ask you to accept my heartfelt apologies for having singled out your district as the scene of my departure from this world, though I confess I have intentionally chosen it. Yes; I confess it, and for this reason. Yours is a rich district, and it is well situated for the publicity which I am anxious to be given to my case. Also, your Court is a large one, and there will be room for many of the public as well as the newspaper reporters. But there is a further reason, and that the principal one of all. You are a man who is generally trusted and respected. Officially you will consider me insane I dare say, but privately—I wonder! At all events, I am leaving a large sum on trust which I wish you, with Father Staunton, the rector of the Ascension Church, to administer, with the object of preventing in future, if possible, similar occurrences to mine. If anybody knowing of this fund which you administer, is tempted as I have been tempted, before they fall let them come to you, and if in your opinions they are in the same Hands, please help them. If they fall, like me, the retribution will be terrible and swift.

What am I driving at? I shall tell you in good time, when, mad or sane, you will

find I am in any event lucid. You, in your position, frequently are asked to unravel self-murder mysteries; frequently the mystery is never solved. Do you remember, for instance, the case of Captain Sebright a few months ago? Why did he commit suicide? He was adored in society. He was not in any money trouble. He was engaged to a charming girl who was as devoted to him as he to her. Yet he deliberately took his own life. *There was no human agency at work there, Mr. Coroner.* A year before he was in dire straits for money, but suddenly a fortune was left him. If my fund had been in existence, and he had come and related his experiences to you, perhaps he would to-day be alive, a happy man. I think, had he known of the fund, he would have come. There are not many men to whom one could relate a story such as probably his was, or mine is, with any expectation of being believed, but you are known to be sympathetic and broad-minded. That is why I have appealed to you to administer this fund, and I know I shall not appeal in vain. And now my name. I am one of the six richest men in England—Valentine Clarke. Ah! you start! Valentine Clarke, speculator and sportsman. You know it? Who does not? For I have shone in the glare of publicity for a year now, though I have not done one single good action in the whole of that time. Good works require no advertisement, and so I suppose that is why the worthless obtain it.

To tell my story coherently I must begin, inappropriately enough considering the circumstances, with a sermon at the Ascension Church, Mayfair, one Sunday night just a year ago. Father Staunton, as you know, is generally considered the most impressive and eloquent preacher of the day. People go in shoals—High Church, Low Church, no church—just to hear him preach. Before he begins you feel he is going to rouse your innermost thoughts. The atmosphere of the church helps. With the faint smell of incense, the last dulcet notes of the organ, and the beautifully trained voices of the choir dying softly away, unless you are of a strangely unemotional nature you cannot help feeling reverent. I was engaged to be married at that time, and both my fiancée and myself were influenced—strongly influenced—by him. We never missed his sermons if we could help it.

The sermon this particular night was

about Satan, and Father Staunton, speaking to a hushed and fascinated congregation, said words which have come back to me again and again.

"Do you think," said he, "that there is no such person as the Devil? As scientific research gradually unveils the mysterious past, and the truth shines forth, the present age of ignorant unbelief will pass, and then people will realise what Satan is. Satan has his work to do, for he stands as the enemy of evolution. Slowly, but surely, the world is moving onwards to better things. One day—it may be millions of years hence—man will have become evolved into a fitting state for heaven. But every soul that Satan can get retards the evolution of mankind and postpones his own ultimate fate. Satan works hard, and he has great powers, but he is failing.

"He cannot stem the tide. Humanity has moved forward spiritually to-day from where it was two thousand years ago, and again two thousand years from now it will have progressed much further. Satan has no hope of preventing this; he can only, as I say, retard it. You may find him working to this end in the cities, in the highways and byways. His ways are devious and far-seeing. He and his emissaries, believe me, are no myths. He is everywhere and can take a thousand shapes. I dare wager he is here in our midst to-night. He meets you in drawing-rooms, in the streets and in the most likely and unlikely places. He never relinquishes his awful task—attempts to stem the evolution of man's soul. But thousands daily give themselves to him; and though, in a future existence, they may to some extent redeem their terrible bargain, Satan exacts his price to the uttermost farthing.

"What is a life?" asked the preacher impressively; and, after a pause, added: "Only a temporary trial. But what is a soul? Ah! A soul is immortal. A soul should be priceless. Yet Satan and his followers are buying up every soul on the market. A soul with a stain on it he gets cheap, though money is no object; for, if a soul can be bought, any price is cheap to the enemy of man. Will you, any man or woman here, sell your soul to him? Money, position, titles, indulgence—such are among the tempter's bribes. Close with him and you have these. But when you sell your soul you must lose at once the greatest gift



"SATAN . . . AND HIS EMISSARIES, BELIEVE ME, ARE
NO MYTHS . . . I DARE WAGER HE IS HERE IN OUR
MIDST TO-NIGHT." (Page 258.)

there is—happiness. And there is no going back on the bargain.”

Later, when we poured out of the church, everyone naturally was full of Father Staunton’s brilliant sermon.

“At any rate, Valentine dear,” exclaimed my fiancée laughingly, as she took my arm, “we have not parted with our souls yet, have we?”

“How do you know I haven’t?” I said lightly.

“Well, dear silly! If you had, I suppose you wouldn’t be a struggling cashier in the City with a hundred-and-fifty a year—for one thing.”

I sighed: it was a sore point. We loved one another dearly, but the prospects of our marriage seemed very remote. For it was a fact that, up to twelve months ago, twelve pounds ten shillings a month was my cash value in the eyes of my employers, though they held a high opinion of me, and my future prospects were promising. But, as we always said, you cannot live on prospects.

“Wouldn’t it be lovely,” pursued Evelyn—that was her name—“if we were rich? Think what it would mean! Oh, Valentine, if we were to tell mother to-morrow that you had come into a fortune, wouldn’t she welcome you then?”

“How is your mother, dear?” I asked, with an effort. Evelyn’s people did not favour our engagement.

“Oh, all right.”

“I know what you mean, dearie. Still giving you a rotten time because you won’t break off your engagement? It is a shame!” I cried hotly.

“Don’t, Valentine! Mother knows, she says, that the greatest misery on earth is poverty. She means well for both our sakes. One day, when prospects improve——”

“Of course! Prospects! Always prospects!” I broke in impatiently. “Meantime, she does her best to make us both miserable. It’s callous, and it’s all wrong, Evelyn.”

“Yes.”

“I wonder if there is anything in what Father Staunton said?”

“You mean——”

“About the devil giving one unlimited wealth if you say you will sell him your soul. I wonder how you set about it?”

“Valentine, don’t joke over such things.”

“I’m not. I don’t see how, even if you *did* agree to sell the old gentleman your soul, it would necessarily make you bad. And, if it did not make you bad, what would it profit him? You see——”

Evelyn gently disengaged her arm.

“I don’t like you when you talk like that,” she said. “You are playing with fire.”

“Nonsense!”

For a minute neither of us spoke. A slight estrangement had sprung up between us. She, I could see, was hurt, and I—well, I felt defiant and angry. The world seemed to conspire to prevent our being married and happy.

“Father Staunton talked about losing happiness,” I continued defiantly. “But we are not happy now. What is the good of being poor and unhappy? At least, one might be rich if one has to be unhappy. It is less unendurable. Your mother makes you wretched and tries her best to force you to break off our engagement. She is always telling you what a grand position you might have if you would marry that rich cousin of yours who is so much in love with you. Upon my word, darling, I would be inclined to close with Satan at once!”

“No, no, no!” She shook my arm. “You must not say that. For my sake, love——”

I laughed mirthlessly.

“Why not? No harm can come of it. Don’t be so superstitious. If I could obtain a large fortune, I would sell my soul to the devil, and call it a good bargain!”

Just as I said these words, a man brushed past me, and I will swear I heard him distinctly whisper in my ear as he passed, the single word “*Done!*” A moment later I realised that it must be an absurd fancy.

As I said “A good-night” to Evelyn, I could see tears glistening in her large, blue eyes. As she held up her pretty face to be kissed, she looked appealingly at me.

“Valentine,” she said, “you didn’t really mean that, did you?”

“No; of course not,” I replied unsteadily.

“Because I feel sure if you did, it would have a dreadful ending. And I *do* love you, dear Valentine.”

I kissed her fresh, sweet lips and watched her as she went indoors. And my thoughts returned to the man who passed me. His

whisper still sounded distinctly in my ear, and the word was, "*Done!*"

The next day, seated on my office-stool with plenty to do, the figments of my last night's fancy soon vanished. The prosaic realities of life strike you very differently in the daytime when you are but a spoke in the cogwheel of business, and a small spoke at that. We are but creatures of circumstance. The past evening, in the darkness, with the sensuous smell of incense in my nostrils, the soft, eloquent words of Father Staunton in my ears, my future bride by my side, there was little wonder I was ready to dwell in visions. Last night the emotional side of my character had had its fling. Now, I was back face to face with sober fact.

I decided to have a good lunch that day, because, being shaky in the morning, I had touched no breakfast. So, in extravagant mood, I went round to a well-known City restaurant and gave my order. Just as I had done so, a man came in and took the seat opposite me. He was a very striking-looking man, exceedingly well dressed and with a strong face. Whether he could be called handsome it would be difficult to say. His expression was stern, at times even sinister, but when he smiled there was a charm about him that was irresistible. His slight imperial and carefully waxed moustache and olive complexion gave him the air of a distinguished foreigner; when he spoke, however, there was no trace of a foreign accent.

Before long he dropped into casual conversation, and, when we had finished lunch, he offered me a fine cigar, which I remarked on.

"Yes," he said, "you cannot buy them. I am interested in certain factories in Havana, and import sufficient for myself and my friends. You like it?"

"The best cigar I have ever smoked," I replied.

"In that case, if you like to give me your name and address, I shall be delighted to send you along a box or two," he said.

"You are too kind, but I could not think——"

He waved aside the objection my lips were framing.

"It is nothing at all—nothing. I like to give people pleasure. Here is my card. You have, perhaps, heard of me?"

I glanced at the card.

"Prince Sergius Alessandrovitch." I read; and, unable to repress an exclamation of surprise, added: "Oh!"

"Ah, my friend, you know my name, eh?" he said with a smile, showing two rows of perfect white teeth.

"Everyone knows Prince Sergius, the great financier and philanthropist," I said, with a bow.

"And his eccentricities," he added laughingly; "that is, if one believes all they see in the society papers. Well, now, about the cigars. Where shall I have them sent to? Accept this as one of Sergius's eccentricities."

"It is very kind, indeed, of you, sir," I said, as I passed over my card, "and I shall appreciate the gift not only for itself, but as a souvenir of the unexpected meeting of a king of commerce with one of its pawns."

"You are a very diplomatic young man," said the Prince; "and you ought to succeed. Have you a good post?"

"Not very good," I admitted.

"Well, let me do something better for you than cigars, Mr. Valentine Clarke. Why not make some money, eh?"

"Why not? The answer is I do not get a chance, sir. I am only a cashier with a salary of a hundred-and-fifty a year."

"Ah, well, my friend, I will put you in the way to make, say, a hundred thousand odd in a couple of days. Ring up my brokers, Aspinwalls, 77,883 City, and tell them to buy you ten thousand Hakluyts Corporation Ordinaries at once. Their price is now seven and a half, and by to-morrow or the next day they will jump up to twenty. Don't waste any time about it. Good-bye! Come and see me some day—perhaps you would like to come for a few days' shooting at my place in Yorkshire? Best shooting in the country, they say, though I don't care about the sport myself."

He rose from the table and held out his hand. I also rose chokingly. My brain was swimming. Here was a chance to make a fortune, and yet I could not avail myself of it.

"Prince——"

He turned sternly to me.

"Well?"

"It is awfully kind of you and I'm very grateful, only——"

"Ah! How stupid of me! You were going to say that Aspinwalls would not

accept your instructions. I will see to that, as I am just going round there."

"It wasn't that," I faltered; "but—oh, don't you see how impossible it is for me to do this? You are so rich that such a deal is nothing to you, but to me it is stupendous. I dare not risk it."

"Not risk it!" He shrugged his shoulders and called the waiter to help him on with his coat. Then he added coldly: "Just as you please, Mr. Clarke. I thought you were a young man of grit who would not refuse a chance offered him. Possibly, however, you have no ambitions beyond a certain and modest competence as a cashier. If so, I have no more to add."

"Ah, sir, if you only knew how anxious I am to make money, you would not say that!" I exclaimed. "But it is all so—so extraordinary. The idea of brokers buying such a huge block of shares for me paralyses me. I could not possibly take the risk on my own account, while, as regards you, I am only a stranger to you, and could not look to you to pay any losses."

"There will be no losses, my friend," replied the Prince quietly. "Sergius Alessandrovitch does not give advice unless he knows what he is talking about. I have given you a tip which every City man would give his ears to know, and credit at my brokers into the bargain. Now go and do what I tell you, and before the week is half over you will be a rich man."

Yes; I did it. But imagine my anxiety. The Prince's brokers accepted the order immediately, and that evening I owned ten thousand Hakluyt Corporations, value seventy-five thousand pounds, without having a penny in the world to pay for them. Stop! Yes, I had something; for the late City edition of the papers announced a rise of one-half, probably on account of my purchase. Already I had made a profit of five thousand pounds.

But the next day the slump occurred. Hakluyts, as you know, are the great wheat combine, and it was well known that they were attempting to corner wheat at this time. My confidence in Prince Sergius was such that I anticipated no drop in my shares; on the contrary, not only was a substantial profit already mine, but the market indications were firm. The price of wheat was steadily rising, and, owing to the failure of the crop, bound to go much higher. Already, harrowing stories were being

published in the papers of poor people starving, what with unemployment, dear meat and now bread threatening to go to famine prices. Hakluyts were cornering the wheat market.

Five thousand pounds! Already I was a capitalist, already I could marry Evelyn! We could start well——

"You are wanted on the telephone, Clarke," said an office friend.

I felt a presentiment of ill as I picked up the receiver.

"We are Aspinwalls. Is that Mr. Clarke?" said a voice.

"Yes."

"Mr. Valentine Clarke? We have bad news, we are sorry to say. Hakluyts have fallen badly this morning. They are down two and a half points, to 5½. Cannot make out the reason, for, by all appearances, they ought to go up."

"Three points!" I gasped. By a hasty mathematical calculation, I had lost already twenty-five thousand pounds.

"Most unexpected!" said the voice. "Still, it's only a temporary matter, some market move. It can't last. There is some mysterious bear at work in Chicago, and he will come a cropper. You will hold on, of course?"

"Of course," I replied mechanically.

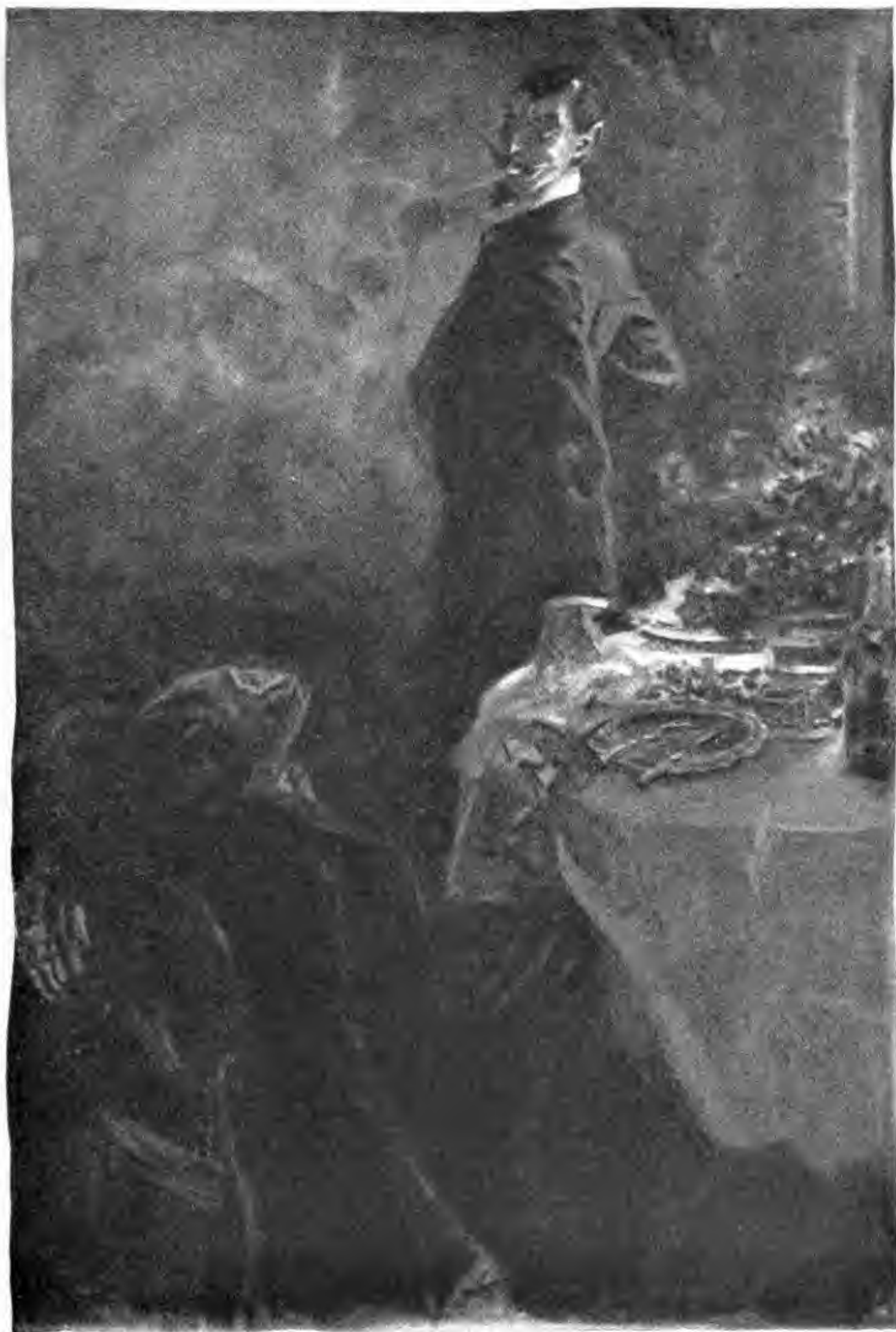
"Er—excuse me—but yours is a new account, you know," continued the voice. "Under ordinary circumstances, we should not trouble you, as you have been warmly recommended by our client, Prince Sergius Alessandrovitch, and we understand you are a man of means. Still, we should like some cover, and, seeing the slump—though only temporary, we are sure—can you let us have a cheque?"

"How much do you want?" I asked huskily.

"Well—er—say five thousand, now. If the stock falls lower, we may have to trouble you again before settling day, but will try not to. Then I may expect you to send it along?"

"Very well. I'll bring you a cheque this afternoon," I replied.

So Sergius was a false prophet, and I was ruined. Yet, in a sense, I felt a peculiar feeling of relief. The memory of the sermon, and the man who so mysteriously brushed past me had not quite faded; and, yes, let me confess it, once or twice I had had an uneasy feeling. Who was Prince Sergius?



IN PLACE OF THE HANDSOME MAN OF THE WORLD I SAW THE SARDONIC
FEATURES OF—SATAN (*Page 268*)

Was he—— No, no; utterly absurd! Impossible! Was he not one of the best-known financiers of the day? Was he not an actual personality? And yet the doubt had crept up unbidden to my mind, although I tried resolutely to put it away.

If, however, I was ruined, the circumstances did not point to the wild conjectures I had formed. Nor had there been any talk of selling my soul. I had, at all events, preserved that, though I would be a disgraced and, in a few hours, a ruined man.

Ruined? A sudden thought struck me. Need I be ruined? Why should I throw up the gloves at the first blow? If I failed to meet my obligations, I should lose my employment and, with it, Evelyn. My firm would not keep a cashier who had gambled in thousands of pounds not his own. Why not as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb? Aspinwalls had said the slump was only a temporary market move. Yes; I would do it. My firm was wealthy; though, in my case, at least, mean. I handled their money, I knew their bank balances, and, the senior partner being away, the passbooks would not be examined till the Friday. I reflected with a grim smile how foolish they were to trust me with such large amounts, when they paid me so little. Probably, too, it would never be found out; certainly not, if the market recovered.

It meant signing a cheque for the amount of this temporary accommodation, to be sure. Forgery I would not call it, for probably I could arrange that the cheque should never be presented, as the name of my firm was good enough for ten times the amount. So I drew a cheque for five thousand and would have defied anyone to spot anything suspicious about it.

Thus armed, I went round to Aspinwalls, sent in my card, and was immediately ushered into the partners' sanctum. Mr. Aspinwall, an old gentleman of benevolent appearance, received me, and with him was a middle-aged man, evidently his son.

"We are very sorry to have to trouble you, Mr. Clarke," said Mr. Aspinwall senior, after preliminaries had passed, "but you will see your money back again in a few days, I have no doubt—er—no doubt whatever."

"It doesn't matter," I replied nonchalantly. "But, as you see, it's my firm's cheque. Perhaps you will be able to hold it

as security for a day or two, before paying it into your bank?"

"H'm. We don't usually do such things——"

"That will be all right, father," interposed the younger man, who was closely examining the cheque, "Mr. Clarke's firm's cheque is good enough for us."

"It will assist me if you do," I said airily. "But please yourselves, of course."

"You are not a partner in the firm, are you, Mr. Clarke?" asked the old man. There was, I fancied, a tinge of suspicion in his voice.

"No, not yet," I replied, "but why do you ask?"

"No reason, my dear sir, no reason. I only wondered——"

"You know I'm a friend of Prince Sergius's," I said hastily; "and you can refer to him if you wish."

"No need at all, Mr. Clarke," said the younger man, who was still gazing intently at my cheque in his hands. "It's quite all right. I should like to ask you something, however, if you don't mind. Who put you on to these Hakluyts?"

"The Prince."

Father and son exchanged glances.

"Oh!" said the old man.

"Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity, my dear sir, curiosity on my son's part—nothing else, I assure you——"

"But you must have had some reason?" I persisted, looking at them both in turn.

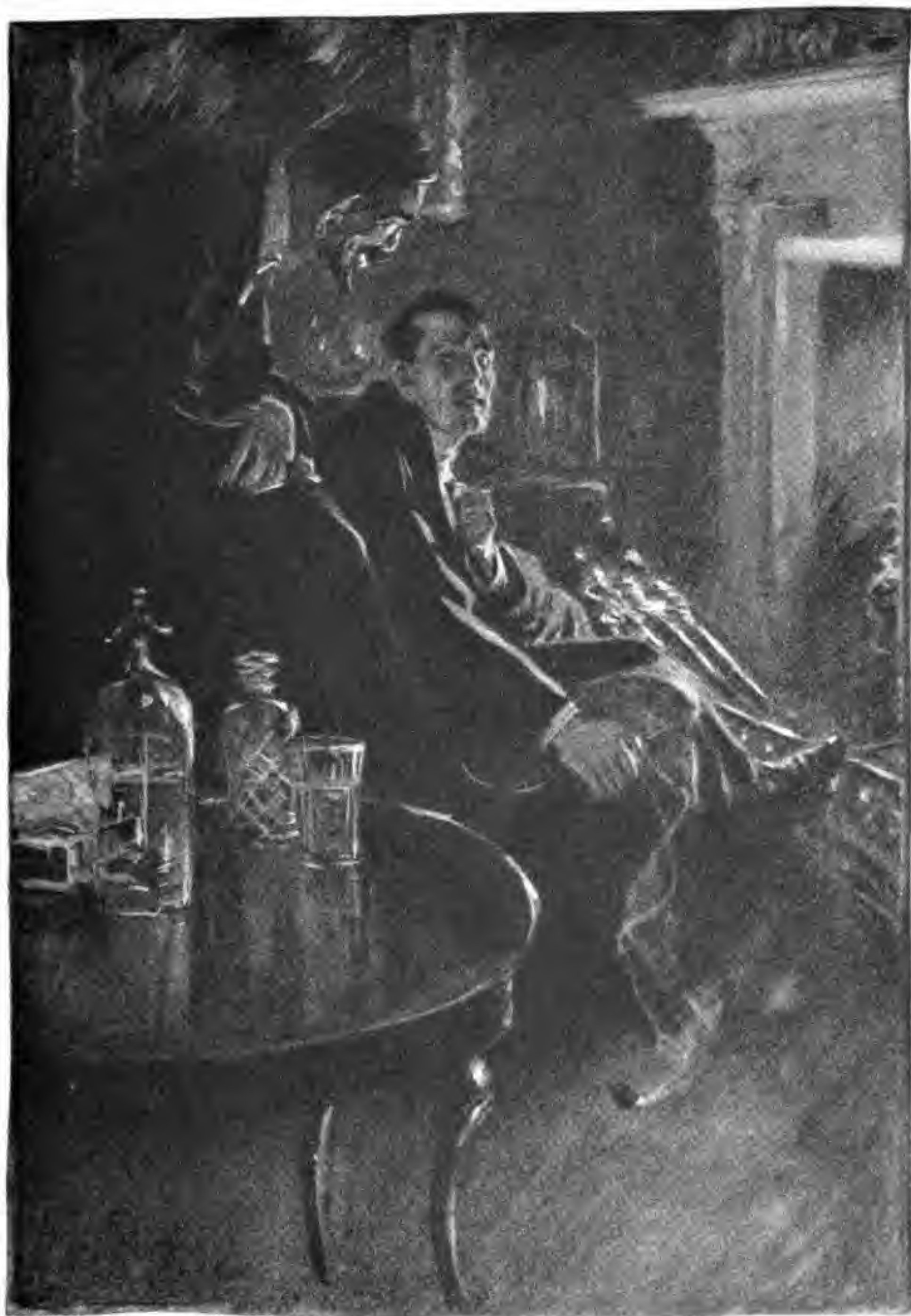
"Yes, Mr. Clarke, we had a reason," replied the son smilingly. "I had a little theory which is evidently incorrect——"

"And that was?"

"About the Chicago bear. My father and I had an argument on the subject of the speculator. I thought it might be the Prince who was bearing. He has not bought here; and he conducts large operations, of course, in America. The Chicago brokers, too, are the firm who act for him, as is well known. The mere fact that he was suspected of selling Hakluyts would be sufficient to send them down with a run."

"And I told my son, Mr. Clarke, that the Prince would not do such a foolish thing. He knows the market thoroughly, and, if anything, would buy—become a bull. His advice to you proves it," added the old gentleman triumphantly.

"You were right, father. The Prince is as straight as a die. If he told his friend Mr.



LEANING OVER THE BACK OF THE CHAIR, WITH A LEERING SMILE ON HIS FACE. (*Page 268.*)

Clarke to buy he may be sure the advice is sound."

"Well, good-night, gentlemen," I said. They bowed me out.

Need I add that I spent a restless night?

The next day the stock had declined a further point on renewed selling from Chicago. My nerve was leaving me. I was desperate. There was only one thing to do—to appeal to the Prince. He had got me into this mess, and he must either get me out of it, or—well, I did not like to contemplate the alternative.

Perhaps he would have written to me at the office. I found there a case of cigars awaiting me. There was no letter with it, only the Prince's card. A letter in a feminine handwriting was the only other thing, and with an inward groan I opened it. It was from Evelyn's mother, who had heard from "our" darling that I had made five thousand pounds in a deal. She always knew I would get on, &c., &c., and neither she nor Evelyn's father would now raise any objection to our marriage. Would I go to dinner there that night? Don't bother to dress, but just come. Evelyn was expecting me. Enclosed in this effusion were a few lines in *her* handwriting. "I am so glad, dear Valentine, at least, I suppose I am," she wrote. "You will come to-night, won't you? You will find your news has made you most popular here. I shall expect you.—E." What did she mean by "I suppose I am?" Did she suspect, too? In a sudden fit of rage I tore both letters into little bits. For the obvious moves of Evelyn's mother I had every contempt, but I was angry and hurt with Evelyn. What right had she to upset me by her absurd superstitions?

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle—the telephone rang furiously. I picked up the receiver.

"Hallo! hallo!" I cried. A deep resonant voice was speaking to me.

"Good morning, my dear Clarke."

"Ah! Prince Sergius!"

"I thought you would probably be at the office early. I rang you up to find out how you were getting on." There was a note of mockery in the voice.

"I'm afraid I have not much to thank you for, Prince," I said determinedly.

"Ha, ha, ha! you mean the Hakluyts." The Prince laughed gaily through the telephone. "Don't worry over that. They will be up, as I said, to twenty immediately."

"You don't perhaps realise," I cried, "what my position is, meantime. I had to find a huge sum for cover yesterday."

"I'm sorry!"

"I want to see you. Can I? There is something most important to tell you. I cannot explain things over the 'phone."

"I have a good deal to do to-day. Still, if I can help you——"

"You can, Prince. You *must*. It's a question of life or death."

"Very well, then. Come to the Savoy and have lunch with me. I shall expect you at two o'clock. Ask for me, and they will conduct you to my room."

He rang off.

Prince Sergius was evidently well-known at the Savoy. One of the managers, with much formality, led me to the Prince's suite. His room was enveloped in fragrant exotic flowers. Two beautiful women, dressed in the height of fashion, were taking leave of him as I approached, and from the society papers recognised them as the Duchess of Granville I and the Countess of Silkstone, leading members of the fastest set, so rumour says. As they left him one said: "We shall expect you then, Prince?" With a low bow to them he turned to me, and holding out the tips of his white fingers invited me to sit down.

"You will pardon my not taking any lunch with you, my dear Clarke," he said, "but as you probably guessed I have eaten with my fair guests. I invited you to come specially at two as I knew you would prefer to talk to me alone. Was I not right?"

"Mine would make perhaps an ugly story in public," I said grimly. "It's about a forgery."

The Prince glanced at me under his long lashes.

"Go on," he said. "Don't mind the waiter. He only speaks Russian."

"There is little to tell. You forced me to buy Hakluyts——"

"Don't say 'forced.'"

"Induced then, Prince——"

"That is better. I told you that you would make your fortune. So you will. You were a free agent in the matter to buy the stock or leave it alone. You wisely bought."

"And to cover the drop I had to forge my firm's name, for five thousand pounds." I exclaimed desperately. "Your brokers hold the cheque now."

"You were foolish, Mr. Clarke," said the

Prince languidly, "you should have referred them to me."

"You can assist me yet." I spoke rapidly. "Aspinwalls have not cashed the cheque yet, as a special favour."

There was a momentary pause. Then the Prince said quietly:

"They are doubtless well aware that it is a forged cheque."

My face fell.

"Aware of it! How can they be?"

"How could Mr. Valentine Clarke, an employee at a small salary, obtain his firm's cheque at a moment's notice for five thousand pounds?"

"It is possible."

"It would want some explanation, you must admit," continued the Prince in suave tones, "especially when you ask them not to cash it."

"If they thought it was a forgery, why did they take it, then?" I asked faintly.

"Because you went to them on my introduction. Aspinwalls are judicious people. As a matter of fact, they have communicated with me. You may read their letter."

He tossed me over a memorandum. It ran thus:

"Sir,—Mr. Valentine Clarke, who came to us on your recommendation, instructed us to buy ten thousand Hakluyts Corporation at 7½. As they fell 2½ points to-day we suggested some cover. Mr. Clarke brought us a cheque for £5,000 ostensibly drawn by his firm in our favour, and requested us to hold the cheque temporarily. We have reason to fear there is some irregularity in the signature, but we refrain from taking any steps until hearing from you.

"Your obedient servants,

"ASPINWALLS."

"Well?" asked the Prince. "What do you propose to do?" An enigmatic smile played on his lips. My own were parched, and I drained the glass of champagne by my side. With a new-born resolution I looked at him.

"You are going to save me," I said. "Morally, you are responsible for this."

"Indeed, sir! Did I suggest you should forge your employers' name and qualify for, say, five years' penal-servitude?"

"No, Prince. But you tempted me to buy those shares knowing I had not the money to pay for them. You promised me they would go up, and they have fallen."

"I never said they might not fall first. I said they will go to twenty, and so they will."

I glanced at Aspinwalls' note again and passed it back to him.

"They don't mention their conversation with me in this note," I remarked, with an assumption of calm. "It turned on Hakluyts. They said that a big operator was bearing the stock in Chicago."

"That is quite possible."

"Curiously enough the brokers are known to be yours. . . . Prince Sergius, I charge you with being the Chicago bear. Can you deny it?"

"Deny it. Why should I? You are talking nonsense!"

"I am convinced that it is true, all the same. Prince, I charge you as well with tempting me to buy those shares when it was your deliberate intention to cause them to fall!"

"Is it not a waste of time to continue such a foolish and fanciful idea Mr. Clarke? I have nothing to reproach myself with in your case. I told you the shares would go up. I should say," he added, drawing out his watch and looking at it, "that they have begun to rise already."

"So you refuse——"

"I refuse nothing in reason. I will help you to retrieve your losses and to make your fortune, too, if you are sensible. I think you said the other day—last Sunday, to be precise—that if you could obtain a large fortune you would be ready to sell your soul."

I stared at this man with amazement not unmixed with fear.

"You heard me say that!" I gasped.

The Prince laughed softly.

"It is simply explained. You thought you saw me for the first time last Monday at lunch, but I recognised you. On Sunday night I passed you and a very charming young lady, and could not help overhearing your words."

"You are, then, the man!" I cried involuntarily.

"Yes. I was also at the Ascension Church. Father Staunton always attracts me. His church is a queer institution. He draws half the moral lepers of London there. But now to settle your business, my dear Clarke. I can get your cheque back and you can destroy it without a soul knowing, but of course you must conform to my terms. In a couple of hours from now you can be worth exactly a hundred and twenty thousand pounds. From henceforth, everything

you touch will be turned into gold. In six months you will have made between three and four million pounds. The world will be at your feet. Politics? Diplomacy? Titles? I won't mention fair women—they are all yours. In return, you know what I want—you offered your soul to me on Sunday night. I clinched the bargain then. Do you confirm it?"

Was I dreaming? The room seemed to be getting dark—to be revolving. Involuntarily I clutched the table. He continued:

"You must say just one word to seal the bargain. Is it 'Yes'?"

He paused for an answer, leaning over the table. His eyes met mine and my lips framed the fatal monosyllabic reply. Immediately he rose from his seat, his voice changing from its customary rich baritone to a hiss:

"It is 'Yes.' Good! I am a man of my word, Valentine Clarke, and so you can have your fling. You said you would sell your soul to me for riches, and riches beyond the dreams of avarice you shall have. Adieu, my friend. We shall doubtless meet again on occasions. Try and be happy."

The last few words, uttered with scorn, dimly filtered through my mind. And then an extraordinary thing happened. In the seeming darkness his face suddenly underwent a change. In place of the handsome man of the world I saw the sardonic features of—Satan. I remembered no more.

I fear, Mr. Coroner, I have trespassed on your indulgence far too long already, but there is imperative need for me to complete my narrative. For several days after the events I have related I was extremely ill, with long periods of delirium.

As I recovered my normal state I found that I had succumbed to a sudden attack at the luncheon-table. The Prince, it seemed, had been called away, and it happened during his absence. They had put me to bed and engaged trained nurses.

All that Sergius predicted came true. The Hakluyt Stock had rushed up as suddenly as it fell, and when my brokers sold out I was already a man whose fortune approached two hundred thousand pounds. Since then, whatever I have touched has turned to gold. I have gambled recklessly and in the most absurd enterprises. I have financed theatrical tours, owned race-horses, run a system at Monte Carlo, and

won every time. I have tried even to lose money, but without avail.

You will, perhaps, think that I might have done some good with this money, given sums to charities or to the poor. But I was disinclined to do good acts. I would spend, perhaps, a thousand pounds on some mad caprice of wantonness or dissipation. Do you remember my famous dinner a few months ago when every guest drank a dissolved pearl worth a thousand pounds? On the other hand, poverty, instead of attracting my pity, only repels me. After my illness I became another man. The instinct of sympathy seemed to have vanished. I had no longer any heart. I became hard and cynical, so that, though I was surrounded by flatterers and sycophants, I had not a friend.

Not one? Evelyn? *She knew*. Not that she told me, but when it got in the papers that I was a millionaire and doing this and that, I had sufficient sense of decency left not to force myself on her. I knew the truth could not be disguised from her. And I was right. One day a little registered parcel arrived which contained the gifts I had given her in our happy days. Not a line or letter with them.

I did not care. My love for Evelyn had frozen up. I could not marry her, and could offer no explanation, so the only thing to do was to give her a wide berth, which I did. And for this I had sold my soul.

Gradually I became morose, morbid, nervous. At nights I would sit in my Piccadilly flat, shunning company. Not always, though. On other occasions a wild fit of hilarity would grip me, and with boon companions we would paint the town red. That is why they say I am a sportsman! One paper publishes every week fatuous jokes about me in its columns.

One night I was in the depths of depression—the fits gradually became more severe—and was alone in one of the splendidly furnished reception-rooms of my suite. The electric light trying my eyes, I had turned it out, and was lounging in a club-chair, watching the flickering light of the fire. Something caused me instinctively to turn round, and, leaning over the back of the chair, with a leering smile on his face was—*my owner*. I gave a gasp and sprang up, but he had vanished.

That was about a month ago. Since then he has returned frequently. Another night



A YARD BEHIND EVELYN, HIS ARMS FOLDED AND REGARDING US WITH AMUSED INTEREST, STOOD SATAN. (*Page 270.*)

I was reading a book that had attracted my attention at a bookseller's. It was called "The Future Life," and attempted to portray the future existence of our souls. Incidentally it scoffed at the "antiquated idea" of the Devil. I flung the book passionately across the room. The sight that met my eyes turned my blood cold. Steadily gazing at me, with cold, calculating eyes, from the part of the room in shadow was—Satan. Yes, believe me, it was no hallucination. I picked up the whisky-decanter, which happened to be handy, and flung it at him. As it broke into a hundred small pieces I heard a laugh.

After that I carried a revolver always with me, and for some days I was spared a further visitation. Now I come to this very day. This morning something impelled me to go to Kensington Gardens. With a sensation akin to suspense I strolled about the gardens. Suddenly, approaching me came two ladies, one oldish, the other young. It was Evelyn and her mother. But not the old Evelyn. Her wasted figure and pallid cheeks, the hectic flush and burning eyes told their own tale.

They saw me at the same moment, and the older lady, placing her arm in her daughter's, would have led her away past me. But Evelyn stopped, and beckoned me to her. As I approached she placed both hands on my shoulders and looked steadily in my eyes. Then she shuddered.

"Valentine," she whispered, "may God forgive you! I pray for you all day and every day."

I lowered my eyes, unfitted, nay unable to meet her gaze. Then a maddening sight met my eyes. A yard behind Evelyn, his arms folded and regarding us with amused interest, stood Satan. Without a second's hesitation I drew out my revolver, and,

aiming at him, pulled the trigger. With a shriek Evelyn fell fainting in my arms.

Let me draw a veil over this painful scene and conclude, Mr. Coroner. There is but this to add: Why should I not take my own life? The man who commits suicide is, I verily believe, terribly punished hereafter. But in my case, I have sold my soul to Satan. Shriek it from the housetops. Let the world know that in the year of our Lord, 1910, one man acknowledges that he has sold his soul to the Devil.

Since I have no future to look forward to, why dwell in the present? I have nothing but wealth. Money brings but few things, for all the greatest gifts in life it cannot buy. Happiness is not for me, and I am tormented by this inexorable demon, who will not only exact his bargain to the uttermost, but haunts me to gloat over it.

Yes. . . . Here is my revolver, a dainty little weapon. . . . Which is the best part to apply it to? The heart? The fear is one might miss the vital part and then merely wound. The head? It is disfiguring, but I must chance that. Good-bye, Mr. Coroner, good-bye! And as you are a Christian man dispense that fund. I have no doubt about Father Staunton.

VALENTINE CLARKE.

The Coroner laid down the manuscript.

"Poor fellow!" he said. "Poor, poor young man."

"Shall I issue jurors' summonses, sir, for to-morrow?" asked the officer.

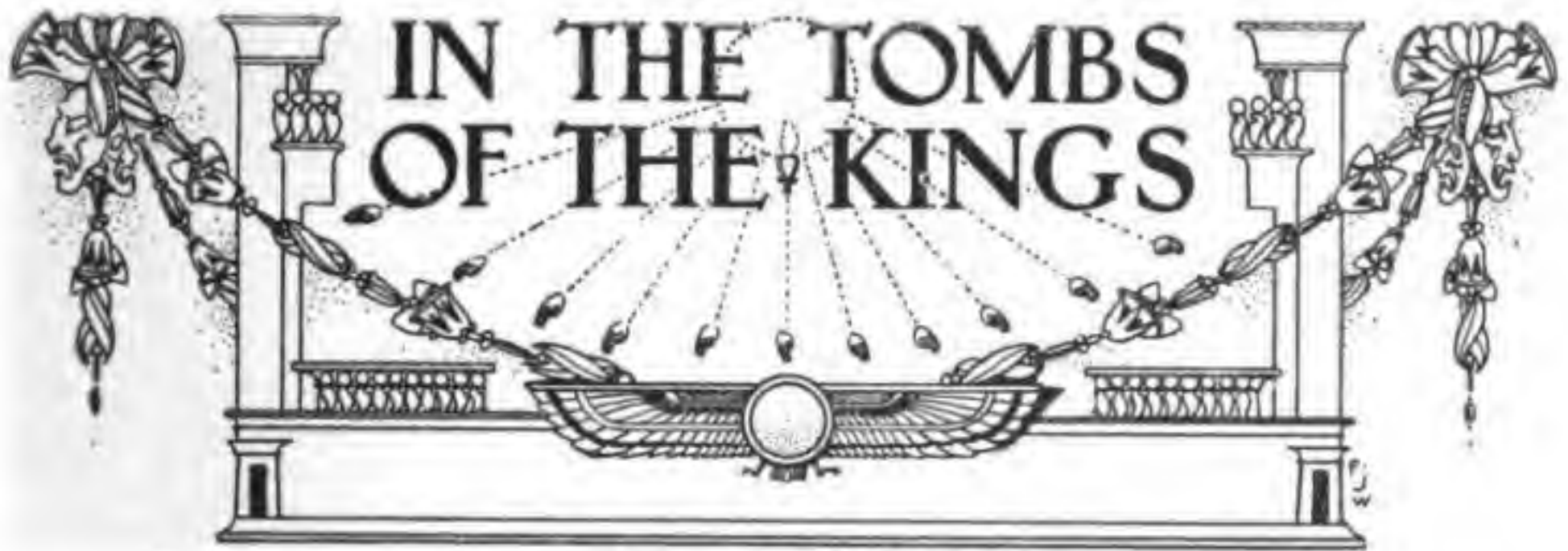
"Thank you, if you will. Good-night, Edwards. Close the door after you."

"Yes, sir. Good-night, sir."

As the door quietly closed the Coroner looked somewhat apprehensively round the room, and then once again picked up the manuscript.

MARK KISSING.

THE END.



A Complete Story

BY L. T. BAGNALL

ILLUSTRATED BY A. C. MICHAEL

PART I.

PAUL VYNING was aware of the honour done him when Crane, the distinguished Egyptologist, asked him to take the principal part in the unique play to be performed in the Tombs of the Kings. But he had made all his preparations to start on a combined sporting and archaeological expedition to the Fayoum; the last camel was bought, the last "reliable" Bedouin hired, the last case packed and corded; and it was somewhat trying to leave the headless caravan expensive and inert in Cairo, while he tore up to Luxor to perform the rather invidious task of filling Crane's place. However, he scarcely hesitated. His father, Lord Quest, was also a keen Egyptologist, and an old friend of the Cranes, with whom Vyning had stayed several times both in Egypt and London. Without conceit, he knew that with his dramatic bent, and his love and knowledge of ancient Egypt, he was perhaps the most suitable substitute to be found.

The adventure had been kept as dark as possible, though rumour was busy in Cairo. All Vyning knew was that a mystery-play taken from ancient Egyptian history, and written by Crane, was to be acted in the natural amphitheatre of the Tombs of the Kings; and that the costumes and ornaments had been carefully copied, and were historically accurate.

He had not arrived in Cairo until after the "James Crane Company" had gone up to Luxor. But at Shepherd's he had run against Carlton Arbury, London's biggest actor-manager—both physically and professionally—who had told him that he was one of the select audience invited to witness

this performance extraordinary. Arbury gave him a list of people distinguished in various ways, who happened to be in Egypt at the moment, and were bidden to foregather at Luxor before February 16th. Vyning remarked that he would have liked to add to the distinguishment but that he hadn't been asked, and moreover was otherwise engaged.

Arbury, who was himself out to "entube" local colour, as he put it, for an Egyptian spectacular play of his own, had replied that he didn't suppose Crane knew he was in Cairo, or he was certain to have "sent him a box."

Then, a day or two later, came the imperative wire, probably suggested by Arbury. But why not have made use of Arbury himself? Perhaps his rather burdensome sense of his bigness forbade him to descend to amateur theatricals, however unique.

"Do you ever feel you've been here before?" asked Vyning abruptly.

Claudia Forrest turned her head with the swift deliberateness which belonged to her.

"To Egypt? no; because I never have!"

"Of course it would be too amazing if we both felt it."

"Felt what?" she asked.

"This is a rather weird adventure, isn't it," he parried. It did not seem possible to be direct, when it came to the point.

"What would be too amazing if we both felt it?" she insisted.

"The sense that we've been here before—in the days when England was infested with

unpleasant people with blue skins, before blue blood was thought anything of."

"Do you really feel that?" Her voice, strong and soft, sounded remote in the slow-coming darkness.

"I dare say Egypt hypnotises one. You've never had the feeling?"

"No," she said, "I think the brain sometimes plays one tricks, don't you?"

He glanced at the profile under the big hat, trotting beside him through the dim green velvet of the clover and wheat. Crossing the Nile in the butterfly-winged felucca towards a majestic sunset, her eyes had shown like lapis lazuli in the tan of her skin—tan with a stain of pomegranate in the cheeks. Now, with only the solemn afterglow for light, the calm, grave eyes had grown black.

It was not his habit to give himself away, but to-night a craving for fellowship fought against the bars of reserve, and the bars gave. There was also an underlying sense of intimacy, of the right to fellowship; yet he had only known her two days.

Mystery was abroad to-night, hemming them in on every side, brooding over them. Not only the ordinary nightly mystery,

sinking down upon the ancient, secretive land, with its great river travelling silent to the sea; but mystery of souls, of his soul and hers, and . . . of others. Currents and undercurrents, vibrations from unknown quarters, as at a time of vast electric storm.

He, Paul Vynning, strong in mind and body, who had faced nerve-trying experiences in many lands, was slowly being enmeshed in a web of strangeness which had no parallel. For the first time in his life he felt, not fear, but that cousin to fear only a few degrees less sinister—the sense of awaiting something inevitable, which we would bribe with most things but honour to pass us by.

Someone from the party ahead, whose saddle showed a preference for the underneath of the donkey, loomed in the track, and joined them when the attendant boy had girthed anew. With the cheery voice of Dr. Green, who was to take the part of the Spirit of the Underworld, volleying jests and anecdotes, they left the cultivated land; and as the last thought of luminosity was yielded by the west, the hungry mouth of Bibân el Mulûk received them; Bibân el Mulûk, the valley of dead kings.

PART II.

Vynning emerged from the shed belonging to the Service des Antiquités which was the green room, and looked up at the stars. Somehow they were oddly valuable, oddly friendly to-night.

Out of sight, round a shoulder of sandstone, and semi-encircled by rock walls, was the stage—a mere sandy space. Around it were electric lamps fixed to shortened telegraph poles, the instalment which lights the most interesting of the tombs having been utilised.

Claudia and Mrs. Crane were not ready; and the Spirit of the Underworld was engaged in bolting ham sandwiches, having missed his dinner.

Vynning went cautiously forward and had a look at the audience from behind the rock buttress. It would be amusing to see if one could recognise the faces, mere pallid blurs at first against the background of night. Yes, there was Fawley the artist; the blue-white glow revealed his carrotty hair; and to the left of the little semi-circle was Witham Semfield, the novelist; and next him Kenaway of the Police and his wife. Farther along, a distinguished

visitor from Austria; and, bellowing musically at a jest of his, the consciously leonine head of Carlton Arbury, who was supposed to be stage-managing; and the Duchess of Blaize and her daughter Betty Arnwold; and one or two more whom Vynning did not know.

That web of strangeness and of suspense, which had been thickening round him ever since he landed on the Theban side, tightened and changed character. It seemed specially designed to isolate the spirit. The isolation slowly grew immeasurable. People and things, though still vaguely sensed, went out of focus. The new reality which formed round the consciousness became of a piercing, a hitherto unknown distinctness. But it was reality of the supersensual; and Vynning knew it, and desired with part of his brain to swing back to the normal focus. Yet he could not.

There had been several rehearsals at the hotel at Luxor since he had arrived a couple of days before; and, previous to his coming, a dress-rehearsal in the rock amphitheatre itself. The day after, Crane, who had



"NOW LET LONG-DESIRED DEATH ENVELOP ME!" (Page 443)

worked in Egypt scatheless for thirty years, sometimes staying out the whole of the summer, was suddenly laid low with ophthalmia. His case was so serious that he was immediately sent down to Cairo with a doctor, though he pleaded hard to be allowed to stage-manage if he might not act.

Carlton Arbury, rounding the buttress to start on his managing duties, drew violently back. A remote part of Vyning's brain was amused. Arbury was for that second a badly startled man—a version of him no London audience had ever seen.

"Ye gods," he mouthed sonorously, recovering his poise in a moment. "Come under a light! What a miraculous fitness! Man, man, you're *it*, *him*—the soul of him! Why didn't we see it—the head in the Louvre—it might be modelled from yours!"

"It's time to begin," said Vyning, with odd aloofness. Part of his brain was surprised, looking on as an outsider at his doings. Arbury swelled visibly, assumed the leonine like a mantle, and went to marshal the rest of the company in a huff.

The chattering audience, rather ostentatiously cheerful, hushed swiftly. Darkness swallowed the semicircle of electric stars. In the tense pause a jackal barked, far off. Then there were two figures in the wide space of sand ringed by infrequent globes of pale fire.

Straight from ceremonial worship in the temple of the Aten 3,000 years ago, Akhenaten the King and his wife Nefertiti sought solitude in a hidden gorge of the Theban hills. The king's bowed head was crowned with the majestic double mitre of Upper and Lower Egypt. His bronzed, lean limbs were free from drapery. A tunic of fine white linen emphasised the astonishing jewels, a pectoral, massive bracelets on arms and wrists, a be-gemmed girdle, a collar of winged sun-disks ablaze with rubies. Under the immemorial headdress the austere and profoundly melancholy face gazed as though through the veil of things and far beyond. The eyes burnt, deep-sunk, in a setting pale under its bronze. The long nostrils opened and closed stressfully. The beautifully curved, somewhat thick, but clean lips were mobile with a very torture of stress. He seemed as a man driven into a corner; at the extremity of resource, even of the will to win.

Beside him, twisting the stem of a lotus,

Nefertiti, slender, tall, yet almost short beside the king's stature, subtly expressed in every line her identification with this his agony.

She too was clothed with the ceremonial panoply; with fine linen which was almost gauze; with the winged vulture diadem of gold and electrum; with coruscations of dream-like gems.

The king spoke. Slowly at first, with weary languor; then, like the leakage of a dam, which grows ever more forceful and destructive, his bitter passion gathered power. Pacing and pausing, with incisive gesture and sombre intensity, the man ripped naked the tragedy of his life.

His dominions beyond the borders, won by his forebears, had one by one revolted and joined cause with the Hittites. This, since he was not a man of war, and content with a lesser Egypt, would not of itself have been intolerable, but that the army which had conquered the distant provinces, and a great part of the nobles, cursed him barely below the breath—the land was full of cursing.

In addition to this hatred was that of the Priests of Amen. The High Priest, second only to himself in the kingdom, and who plotted to gain the throne, had twice attempted his life, and his black spells reached far. But blacker than all was the knowledge that his sacred life-work, the establishment of the worship of the Aten, the Principle of Life, symbolised by the blazing disk of the sun, would perish with him. He who had reached after and lived in truth, who had striven fiercely to crush out the worship of the multitudinous gods and establish the adoration of the One who is above all, was the most vilified and distrusted man in the land.

Even those who bowed themselves before the Aten cared nothing for truth, and would bow to Amen, Thoth, Isis and the long train of them, as soon as he, Akhenaten, had voyaged to the Western Land in the Boat of the Sun; yea, the whole city of Thebes would rejoice at his death. His life was like a palm uprooted. Evil brooded, he sickened and longed for the coming of the Boat of the Sun.

Then Nefertiti the queen, kneeling and placing her slack hands on his shoulders, asked with tense extremity of passion if love weighed nothing with him, he who had loved but her; if her soul was nothing

to him, her soul, which would forgo all ease that he might lack nought, but which neither in this world or the land of the dead could live without him.

He answered as from afar off, that a man's kingdom is more than his house, and a man's religion than his love; and a man's despair of himself than a woman's belief in him. And at that he took off the mitre.

He said this not ungently; and raising her, kissed her on the forehead. But she stood rigid, holding a broken lotus-flower.

Then the king groaned that he was weary unto death; would that his summons might come now. In the temple that day he had implored the Aten to loose his soul. Still Nefertiti stood rigid, grasping the broken flower. The king looked where she looked, and with a great cry he went forward, stumbling, and for support laid hands on a jut of rock.

Formless, with great enfolding wings and swathed head, the Spirit of the Underworld slowly separated from the darkness, and stood, faintly discernible, motionless as the rocks. The king, in whom the breath of life fluttered, lifted up his hands and besought the spirit for a last favour. He, who was so soon to be of the dead, desired while yet of the living, to have speech with his great mother Tyi, from whom he had

learnt the blessed truths of the Aten. And lo! not far from the messenger, the form of Tyi slowly separated from the darkness, and stood, faintly discernible, motionless as the dead.

The king made obeisance to his mother, and asked her if he had been faithful to the truth she had taught him. Darkness was coming upon him like an awful sea, but if he had been faithful in her sight he would not be drowned by his despair. The great dead queen told him that he had indeed been faithful; that the poverty of the harvest was not the fault of the sower, and that she awaited him with joy, knowing that he would triumphantly pass through the ordeals of the Underworld.

Then the king, straightening himself in silence, placed again on his head the royal mitre which he had laid aside. With his back against the rock, looking towards the sun rising, he poured forth the hymn of his dying, most wonderful praise of the splendour which is above all.

And when he had finished, he saluted Nefertiti his wife as a man in haste, and cried aloud, gasping:

"Now let long-desired death envelop me!"

At the words he fell. And as darkness covered him there flew shuddering along the rocky walls a terrible cry.

PART III.

"My dear Vyning, heartfelt congratulations on your recovery!" surged the mellow thunder of Carlton Arbury.

It was the evening of the third day after the performance at Bibân el Mulûk. Vyning had been allowed downstairs for the first time since his collapse, and was ensconced in a retired nook of the Luxor hotel garden, on a chaise longue.

"No doubt about it, it was a touch of the sun," continued Arbury positively. "I thought at the time it was tempting his majesty, when you went out bareheaded that morning to see the devil-dancer. You can't play these tricks in Egypt. Extraordinary you kept up so long; plucky of you to stick to it. I thought you weren't quite yourself that night to tell the truth."

Vyning's smile was a little tired.

"But what we're all absolutely floored about is that in spite of your not being yourself and all that, you were so tremendous. No other word for it—tremendous."

"Perhaps just because I wasn't myself," with faintly humorous boredom.

"You've been kept so quiet, I don't suppose you've heard. Do you know, my dear chap, you improvised most of your part? Not mere gag—yards and yards of improvisation. I suppose your memory gave out, with your head being affected, and your sub-conscious mind played up, on its own. Made it chancey work for Miss Forrest; but she was clever beyond words, adjusted herself to your vagaries inimitably. That hymn of yours; that's the astounding thing. It's nothing like any of the ancient hymns that have been found, they say; and it isn't a paraphrase of Crane's. Pity you can't unchain your sub-conscious mind at will. I suppose you hadn't seen the hymn anywhere?"

"No," said Vyning drily; "and if I had, I shouldn't have tried to improve on Crane's version."

"Well, you did. Charlie Grant, the correspondent, he's a friend of the Cranes,



THEY WENT EASILY DOWN THE SMOOTH MUMMY-SLIDE. (*Page 447.*)

took the whole thing down in shorthand. Mrs. Crane was annoyed at first, as they'd banned reporters, but she's glad now. I've got a copy of your dying ode. Like to see it?"

"Thanks," said Vyning, "I should."

The hymn bore scarcely any resemblance to Crane's. Startlingly, piercingly alive, it was free from the other's rather laboured striving after classic correctness. The bald coldness of the ancient hymns of Tel el Amarna, whose vitality is lost in the translation, was non-existent. A flaming fervour ran through it; it strained heavenwards like wild tongues of fire, exulting in affinity with the source of life. The mind of ancient Egypt seemed to have clothed itself in the Anglo-Saxon tongue, and found perfect expression.

Arbury was called away by his secretary. Vyning lay still and tried to think, but his brain was still flaccid and disobedient.

People found him out at intervals, and all said much the same things. Mrs. Crane, reserved and stately, showed she was profoundly stirred by the occurrence. She told him she had sent a full account to her husband; and Vyning whimsically apologised for his departure from the text.

Dinner was brought out to him in the scented dimness by a white-clad Berberine, and after it he lay and thought again. At last he called the Arab hotel boy, who had been told off to look after him, and gave him a note, with instructions.

"I didn't come, on purpose," said Claudia; "I knew you'd been seeing crowds of people, and that you'd be tired out."

"I want to have a talk," with an easiness which betrayed anxiety; "can you stay?"

She didn't say "You mustn't tire yourself," or "We'd better wait till to-morrow," or anything tiresome; she simply said "Yes," and brought a deck-chair near his.

A feeling of infinite calmness came over Vyning.

"It's beastly bottling things up—this sort of thing," with a sigh of relief; "but mind you say when you've had enough, or if you'd rather not—"

"We've got to face it some time," said Claudia quietly.

"Yes . . . I know you felt it too. I realised that as we began to act; but you didn't see anything, did you?"

"No."

"You're not saying that to—to make one feel better?"

"No, I didn't see anything. I almost wish I had."

"Ah!" with complete comprehension.

"I think it would be a good plan if you told me exactly what happened," she said, "and if you have any theory, and then I'll tell you what I—what happened to me."

"I shall feel a lot better when I've done that," with boyish simplicity. He asked her if she minded a pipe, but she noticed that it soon went out and was not re-lit.

"Of course you know the story of Akhenaten? I mean, that the play was pretty well true to life?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose it won't reassure you as to my sanity, but—" He shifted impatiently; "It sounds so preposterous one can hardly get it into words."

"I think I know what your theory is. You think that awful volume of hatred which gathered and plotted against Akhenaten—the Heretic, persists to-day. That the priests, being occultists with extraordinary powers and low aspirations, are still close to earth; able to do mischief, given the right conditions?"

"They were a bad lot," said Vyning, his teeth gripping his dead pipe.

"I suppose you think the acting of the play so near Thebes, their earthly stronghold, started evil vibrations which managed to reach us?"

"Yes," said Vyning.

"What gave you the idea?"

"You evidently had it, too," with a quick smile.

"We're beating about the bush," said Claudia; "let's get into the middle of it."

"I will; but we shall think we're mad before we've done. Do you remember my asking you if you felt you'd been here before, in another life? I've always had that feeling about Egypt. When I was a boy, I remembered details, in flashes; things I couldn't have been told, or read. As I grew older, it wore faint. But when I came to Egypt the first time, it almost frightened me. I was nineteen, a most concrete person, bored with my father's researches and only keen on sport. The way Egypt laid hold of me came back to me. I wasn't the same person when I left. I've been back at intervals ever since. There's always the same feeling of coming home. I was helping Graham Stone to dig

at Tel el Amarna once. He thinks I discovered the foundations of Akhenaten's treasure-house by accident; but it wasn't an accident. It came back to me where it used to be, in a flash. I've been to the Tombs of the Kings several times, of course, and there's always been a feeling that it has a secret connected with me; and of uneasiness. But nothing like this time. This time one was up against something hideous. It can't be put into words. I felt a sort of mesh, tightening. Half way to the tombs I knew a nightmare had got to be faced. I'd no sense of the audience, or of the play, after the first few minutes. It was all real, and I was going through hell. You were real, too—as Nefertiti, I mean. And there was a frightful tearing in half—wanting to stay, and being drawn away by some spell which sapped one's vital centre—numbed the will. I think what really floored me was a kind of fit: But I've never had a fit."

"I don't suppose you have," said Claudia.

"The fear and the despair were—Lord, I don't want to go through it again! If Akhenaten had to deal with *that*, I don't wonder he died at thirty-five; the wonder is he lived so long. He had epileptic fits, by the by—I never thought of that till now."

"What was it you saw?" said Claudia gently.

"I saw mine enemy, the High Priest of Amen," deliberately, after a pause.

Claudia looked at his bronzed, strong face, clear-cut against the oleanders under an electric light.

"You think you were the king?" It was hardly a query.

"I know it."

"I know it, too." Her voice deepened and thrilled.

There fell silence, and a strange, a throbbing sense of fellowship. Vynning could not see her face, only the white blur of her.

"How?" he got out at last. The word shook.

There was another silence,

"I told you I didn't feel I'd been here before—in another life," she said slowly; "it wasn't true. I had an instinct to keep my secret to myself. I, too, *know* I've been here before. I remembered things when I was small, especially a wonderful blue neck-

lace, with lotus-bud beads, made of something like a blend of turquoise and lapis lazuli. I have flashes, even now, especially the moment I wake in the morning—but faint, and very seldom."

"You haven't said how you know—" prompted Vynning, with curbed eagerness.

"That your spirit was Akhenaten's?—I knew almost at the beginning of the play. I felt that fearful evil too. It was there the night of the dress-rehearsal, before you came, when Mr. Crane took the king's part—but not in the same way. It was watchful and resentful, that time. But the night you played, . . . I shall never forget the terror. I felt as if that disembodied hatred was sucking at our souls. It was a fight. It seemed to hate me almost as much as you. There are no words for the abyss one looked into. I don't know how I managed to act. When you began to talk off book I nearly gave up; the last link with a sane world snapped. And then words seemed to be given to me. I could hardly believe that the others didn't feel it. Of course I didn't tell them; but I asked them if the eeriness of the place didn't affect them. They were only uneasy because of your going off on a line of your own; and Dr. Green said he had acute indigestion from eating sandwiches too fast, and was thankful he hadn't to say anything!"

She stood up to go, with a little laugh.

"I must have been unconscious about three hours," said Vynning thoughtfully. "I had a dream somewhere in that time—as I was coming to, I think. I've written it down, and sealed it."

"Why?"

"Because it's a rather astonishing one, and I believe it's coming true. I've got it here. Will you give it to Mrs. Crane, and ask her to keep it for the present?"

She took the envelope.

"Good-night!" she said simply.

They gravely read each other's eyes over their meeting hands.

The man knew that here, and here only, was his soul's completion—a lesson he had not learnt, three thousand years ago. But the woman held aloof, because she believed in the sovereignty of will; and resented with all her pride and all her British loathing of fatalism the driving of age-old Fate.

PART IV.

"This is the place," said Vynning decisively, stopping short.

It was a clearance in the sandstone débris, ending in a doorway hewn in the mother-rock, and closed by a rough palm-wood gate.

"I can't think how you can be sure. The mouth of one tomb is just like all the rest. Anyway, we can't get in, for it's locked."

Claudia stood like a tall blue gentian, in a dress of native cotton, vivid against the burning yellow of the cliffs. She smiled to herself as, without answering, he strode up to the gate. If he had made up his mind that was the tomb, they would soon be inside.

"I know it by the lie of the land, and the general look of it," he said, over his shoulder; "the ordinary person thinks sheep are all alike, but they're not."

"This ordinary person will sit down till the extraordinary one gets in," said Claudia, composing herself in a strip of shade in the cutting.

It was nearly a week after the play. They two were alone in the west valley of the Tombs of the Kings, called by the Arabs the Valley of the Tomb of the Apes. Mahmûd, their donkey boy, a dandy youth of seventeen, had been left with the donkeys at the entrance to the east valley, with instructions to wait there till they returned, even if that event didn't occur till sunset.

It was a matter of over a mile by the winding ravine track to the west valley; but riding meant taking Mahmûd, and they wished for privacy, so they had walked. Tourists seldom penetrated as far as this, for the only accessible tomb held little of interest, so they were not likely to be disturbed.

Vynning tried the gate, but it was locked. Then it was tried by his whole weight, and gave in with a crash.

Secretly his heart sank. He had always heard the west tombs were uninteresting, and, of course, they had all been examined. Yet the look of the place he had seen in his dream corresponded with this valley. And underlying the misgiving was an intuition that he was drawing near to the secret. It was the same intuition which had sent up messages to his surface-mind whenever he approached Bibân el Mulûk, but which were like helio-flashes to the uninstructed. That vivid vision of his might be the clue to the

secret. The mysterious promptings of his under-mind warned him that he was getting near; but the Egyptologist's fine frenzy of discovery almost crowded out thought of the occult. Besides, the occult recedes in burning sunshine, and under a Reckitt's-blue sky.

Both he and Claudia were armed with electric torches, without which no experienced tomb-investigator is happy, and Vynning had a supply of magnesium wire. They negotiated the wreckage of the gate, and began the descent. For twenty yards or so the light from the doorway sufficed, and they went easily down the smooth mummy-slide, on either side of which were the shallow steps for the tread of the living. Then came a down-trending corridor, where the torches were necessary. The walls had nothing unusual in the way of decoration and the ceiling had not even the usual blue ground and white stars.

"Your dream-tomb is rather dull," teased Claudia, as they felt their way on to a second mummy-slide.

"So far," he said shortly.

"So far—and so hot!" she sighed. "Why didn't we bring electric fans as well as torches?"

She refused to harbour the thought, but for a second she wished they hadn't come. Things which had been verities that bewitched night at Bibân el Mulûk, and in the dark garden, had seemed negligible by day; had become more so as gay days of sun and sanity went by. But now again they were not negligible.

Beyond the second mummy-slide was an ante-room; beyond that again, a short corridor; then a flight of steps, and they were in the mummy-chamber. It was perfectly empty. They looked into a small side-room, and into one opposite; but beyond stones and stone-dust, nothing was harboured by the hot and silent spaces.

"Well, I suppose we must give it up," said Claudia, with matter-of-fact resignation; "your dream may have been quite correct, only you saw things as they were before the tomb-robbers made a clean sweep."

She began to remount the lowest slide.

"We're very near," said Vynning quietly, from behind her. "This is the way to the place I saw, but it isn't the place."

A wonder came to her whether what had

happened to him on the night of the play had affected his brain, saddling upon it an obsession. But he was not that build of man; his balance was exceptional.

She had reached the beginning of the long corridor, and of faint daylight, when she heard Vyning's voice calling to her. It sounded indescribably eerie, hardly human—coming ventriloquently from the bowels of the rock. She hesitated for a moment, then went quickly down.

He was kneeling, his torch propped up so that its light fell on the left-hand wall, where a short corridor debouched into the ante-chamber. The plaster with which the walls were covered had here fallen off in big scales, as though less skilfully put on. Claudia's torch revealed his face set in intense concentration. The obsession idea visited her again, but vanished at the sane and cheerful lighting up of the face at sight of her.

"I've found the way in," he said, with a ring of triumph; "but it won't be a woman's job. I didn't foresee it would be so tough. I think the soundest plan will be for me to take you back to Mahmūd, and you could have tea in the east valley before going over to Luxor."

"Thanks," said Claudia, keeping the light on his face; "and may I ask what you intend to do when you've got rid of me?"

"Oh, I must get to the bottom of this. Now the gate's broken the Arabs will be in in no time. Leave it till to-morrow, and it'll be someone else's discovery."

"You invited me to share in the hunt, and now you think you're getting 'hot,' you ask me to go home. I won't go home!" said Claudia.

He looked at her steadily for a moment; then stood up and came close.

"You can't crawl through holes and get covered with dust. And besides, someone must go first to see if it's safe; there are sometimes great pits in the tombs."

"I'll allow you to go first if you like, but I'm coming after. It's early days to argue, after all; there's not even a hole yet."

Vyning looked at her, frowning, then laughed shortly—a laugh of capitulation.

"I've got a tool or two," he said; "I somehow foresaw wanting them."

An hour later two heated and dusty labourers surveyed an opening almost large enough to admit the human frame. An opening had been made there before, and filled up again with loose stones trimmed to a smooth surface and cemented. Half an hour more and Vyning went through, feet foremost; Claudia being left alone with a torch and the tea-basket.

"It's a sort of cave," came his voice presently, "low and quite rough—perhaps an unfinished side-chamber. The floor's a mass of stones. There's a bigish hole in the far wall that they haven't troubled to fill in again. I can't make it out; I suppose it's the Arabs. It's hotter than ever in here; I really think you'd better not——"

The torch, the tea-basket and Claudia followed each other in rapid succession. Vyning chaffed her for bringing the basket through; but she said would he kindly remember that as yet she had had no tea; and who could say if they would come back the same way? Then, Vyning first, they crept through the ready-made hole in the wall opposite.

PART V.

"Stay where you are," commanded Vyning. There was something in his voice which caused her instantly to obey. He was a few steps ahead, on a narrow flight leading down from a two-pillared chamber. He went cautiously downwards; and then the dancing disk of her torch failed to find him.

She waited, shaken by an intolerable excitement. After what seemed an eternity his face came up to her from the steep darkness.

"There's an amazing thing down there," he said, his breath laboured; "it almost knocks one over. There's nothing horrible; come down; it's yours as well as mine."

The magnesium flared up, blue-white and

hissing. For the space of about two minutes the death-chamber was alight, after the secret darkness of 3,000 years. Then darkness fell again, save for the wavering circles of the torches.

Ranged on the sandy floor, singly and in groups, were the funeral furnishings of a Pharaoh; all things necessary for royal state, delight and maintenance in the Underworld. Without method, as though in haste to be gone, those who had carried in the treasure had laid and left it.

Decorated boxes, their lids awry, full of fine pottery figures covered with blue enamel, which did slave's duty for the deceased; gold and silver models of the



"MY NECKLACE!" GASPED CLAUDIA. (*Page 450.*)

Boat of the Sun; a tooled quiver of red leather; a hatchet, inlaid and gilded; gilded wooden chairs with open-work carving; a small funeral chariot, covered with decorated leather; ivory draughtsmen; a pink leather dog-collar with the wearer's name in careful hieroglyphics, wooden models of blind women singers with sistrums; canopic jars with human and animal heads; glass vases of exquisite colour and design, such as had hitherto only been found in fragments in the violated tombs; gold and silver sherbet-jugs and incense-burners, cases full of every kind of mummified delicacy for the departed and of scarabs, amulets, and little instruments and nicknacks, articles for toilet use—mirrors and spoons, jars for kohl, for perfumes and cosmetics; and, tumbled in a corner, a complete funeral canopy of leather, painted and gilded, which once had awned the royal mummies.

Almost in the centre of the oval chamber, on lion-footed wooden sledges, two glorious coffins stood side by side. The usual massive outer shells were absent, doubtless to make removal easier. Faience, enamel, paint, gilding, inlay of glass and precious stones, covering every inch of space, made a chromatic splendour as of inherent light. On the ground around them were withered trails of flowers and olive, and a bunch of sticks which had been the mount of a bouquet. The busy footsteps of those who had carried in the coffins showed upon the sand.

Speechless, in bond to the spell of age-old life and death, Claudia and Vynning stood for several seconds after the magnesium failed.

With a sigh she went forward, followed by Vynning. The light of the torches searched the coffins; then the man and the woman turned to each other with awestruck faces. The carved and painted masks with life-like inlaid eyes, at the heads of the cases, might have been modelled from their own.

Vynning broke the tension with an attempt at a smile.

"You were not an Egyptian, you know, but a princess of northern Syria, and so was my mother, Tyi. This is a most thrilling find; if the bodies belong to the coffins, they are Akhenaten and Nefertiti; I've read the hieroglyphs."

Claudia looked at him as though clutching at things real.

"It's all right," he said, with enveloping

kindness; "it's not a dream, and if it was, it would be a superbly good one——"

"They can't be Akhenaten and Nefertiti," she said in a low voice; "wasn't his body found with Queen Tyi's two or three years ago?"

"That was the body of a woman, proved to be so, by the examining doctors, though Akhenaten's name was on the coffin. His mummy has never been found, or Nefertiti's. They were buried first at Tel el Amarna, three hundred miles or so from here; but it's almost certain their successors and relations brought them to Thebes, and put them away in their own royal tombs, lest the Theban priests should make mincemeat of the heretics' remains."

"Of course, it's nonsense," murmured Claudia; "the brain plays one tricks . . ."

She went over to a lovely faience-enamelled coffer on legs. The rounded lid came open at once, revealing a lining of enamel the colour of the Egyptian summer sky. Tumbled together inside were Queen Nefertiti's jewels, now among the most precious treasures of the Cairo and British Museums.

Claudia gave an uncontrollable cry as she drew out a long string of blue lotus-bud beads separated by crystal leaves, and with a blue winged sun pendant.

"My necklace!" she gasped. "Like a mixture of turquoise and lapis lazuli, yet it's neither!"

As he took the necklace from her, a far-distant rumble, like thunder, travelled to them; but they scarcely noticed it.

"I should say it was unique," he said; "it's not glass, and it's no stone one's ever seen. We'll take this back as one of our proofs. This jade scarab will be useful, too; I rather think it has Akhenaten's cartouche on it."

He looked keenly at her.

"You've had enough—you're very white; I think we'd better get out."

"Not just yet. It will never be the same again—after other people have swarmed in. I have a feeling I should like to . . . pray for their souls, though I suppose you'll think it silly."

"I think nothing of the sort," said Vynning, "it's a very good thought. Only we mustn't be long; the heat and the poor air are bad for you."

Claudia went slowly to the great human-headed coffins, and knelt, her back to him.

Vyning, pretending to examine a canopic jar, watched her. Then he went over and knelt beside her, laying down his torch. She rose presently, and looked him in the eyes, a look he could not read.

"Did you remember you were praying for our souls?" he asked, smiling a little.

"I prayed for the souls that belonged to those two bodies, wherever they are," she answered quietly; "now let us go."

They mounted the stairs in silence.

Vyning threw his torchlight into the cave before getting through the hole.

"You're a prophetess," he said, with a queer laugh; "we don't seem likely to go back the same way."

"What's happened?"

"The roof of the cave has chosen to-day to sit down on the floor."

"Let me look."

A glance showed there was no getting through the fallen mass of rock.

"How cheery," she said thoughtfully, standing up. "How long do you think it will be before we're traced?"

"I'm afraid we're bottled till to-morrow morning. Mahmûd will probably go over to Luxor at sunset, and say that we gave him orders to go home if we didn't turn up. No Arab will be out after dark in unlighted places if he can help it, for fear of djinns. He would rather be beaten than come back and look for us, especially in Bibân el Mulûk! And they couldn't very well start a search till morning. I thought you'd rather I was quite honest. It's entirely my fault; I'd no business to let you come. I can't tell you how——"

"I wouldn't have missed it for worlds. To tell the truth, don't you think we *had* to come?"

Vyning was silent.

"What time is it?"

"Nearly seven."

"We'd better have tea—a very sparing one, though I'm perishing of thirst, or we shall be hard pressed before morning, and wanting to open those sealed jars. Fancy, if I'd left the tea-basket in the other tomb!" She smiled charmingly.

Vyning looked at her with admiring gratitude, but no words came. They lit the etna, and had tea where they were, as it was slightly cooler than lower down. Then they searched and tapped the walls, upwards to where the corridor ended, a few feet above the hole, in the untouched mother-rock;

and downwards, through the series of slopes and steps and chambers. But there was no outlet.

"I wonder where you'd like to sleep," said Vyning, on the threshold of the mummy-chamber.

"Sleep? Not here, anyway!"

"Of course not. Near the cave-hole would be best I think; it feels as if some fresh air gets through here. But we must try round every inch of the mummy-chamber first. It's the end of all things in an ordinary tomb, but this one having been used as a hiding-place, perhaps specially designed for one, there's no saying where it mayn't be different; and we didn't look into the side."

They had reached the last step into the chamber. Vyning stopped dead. Something met them on the threshold which they had not been conscious of before. No words were needed. They avoided each other's eyes. Claudia had a hideous mental vision of herself, flying with shriek on shriek up the steps and corridors. Had she ever done that before? . . . She asked Vyning unsteadily whether the Egyptian authorities would gather in all the spoil, or if the British Museum would be allowed to have some of it. She saw he was hurriedly preparing to use the magnesium.

As it flared they stood still, not far from the entrance. A strong instinct came to flee like children; but counter-acting it was the dogged English preference for facing the music. They would retire decently and in order, and not before they were ready. After all, this new atmosphere which had come to the place was merely the result of knowing they couldn't get out. All in a moment, deadly fear weakened them like a nausea.

"Come away!" rasped Vyning. "This air's enough to make an ox faint."

His face was ghastly.

The appalling cloud of evil and of horror was drawing in upon them like a poisonous miasma. Vyning had been in it before, but Claudia it had hitherto only brushed. She seemed to be sinking, whirling, through endless space, pursued by something too abominable to realise. And all the time her eyes saw the strewn, cavernous chamber, crudely lit by the hissing flare. Then it went out.

She felt Vyning grip her arm and turn back towards the staircase. The next moment she realised that he was on the



VAPOROUS, AS IF ITS ELEMENTS WERE STILL IN FLUX, A MAN, SCANTILY CLAD IN A PALE GARMENT. THE HEAD AS



HUMAN FIGURE SHOWED. IT WAS THAT OF A VERY BIG
WELL AS THE FACE WAS SHAVEN BALD. (Page 454.)

point of another seizure. He was beyond words, and she knew that if he lost consciousness she would lose her reason.

She had pocketed the matches after the tea-making. Shaking free from his convulsive hold, she lit one and held it to his hand. He had turned, and was staring at the far end of the chamber, as if hypnotised, his torch unused. As the flame bit him he started violently and his face altered. Raising the torch he threw the light upon the narrow opening into the farthest side-chamber.

Vaporous, as if its elements were still in flux, a human figure showed, directly in front of the black mouth of the little room.

Under their eyes it grew almost opaque, solidifying exactly like one of Maskelyne and Devant's ghost tricks.

It was the figure of a very big man, scantily clad in a pale garment, on which showed as it were the shadows of massive ornaments. The head as well as the face was shaven bald. The fearful reality of it was not in its mere form, but in its purpose; the purpose of which the form was the expression. Space was filled with it; there was no room for anything else; their spirits struggled like suffocating things. And all the time the terrible, unwinking eyes were fastened on them.

"Go back!" commanded Vynning hoarsely, still staring at the great, greyish shape.

"Why?" she demanded, with a shrill pipe which vaguely shocked her. "I'm not a coward!"

"Go back, I say!" he whispered fiercely.

"That's silly," she argued on that queer high note. "We're going to look for a way out, and two heads are better than one." She had taken her eyes from the figure as she spoke. When she looked again it seemed to have moved forward a trifle. Vynning turned upon her.

Swiftly, before she could think, he had her roughly in his arms and was bearing her up the staircase.

"Go back to the opening into the cave and stay there," he panted, setting her down.

With no conscious thought she stayed motionless for a few seconds, listening to his fast-going steps. Then, like a shaft loosed from a bow, she sped down, strong and sure.

She heard a noise as of a furious wild beast as she flew across the sand.

Vynning was savagely striking at something

in the entrance to the side-chamber where had stood the shape. But now nothing but Vynning was visible.

Without a pause she ran on, calling his name. He had dropped his torch when he seized her, but held it now, downwards. As her light smote into the pitchy doorway she caught a glimpse of an awful mask of malignity, nebulous, and as though receding into the small chamber.

Vynning looked at her without recognition. His right hand gripped the gilded axe of King Akhenaten; his face was hideous with Berserk-like rage.

Swiftly she put her arms round him, looking deep into his savage eyes.

"Listen," she said, "*in there is the way out*; he was guarding it, but he's given it away. We're stronger than he is—now!"

There was a moment of tremendous strain. Then instinct turned the scale. She reached up and kissed his lips.

He gave a shuddering groan, as though evil was going out of him.

"How do you know?" he muttered, like one waking.

"It came to me. Let's see if it is!"

Together they went in.

The floor of the small chamber ended in a drop into a rectangular shaft some twenty feet deep. At the far end was a square of hewn stones, like a filled-in window, low down in the rock wall. The three other side-chambers held no possibilities.

They stood in silence looking into the pit. It was not promising as a way of escape. To get into it was difficult enough, and once there, getting out would be still more so.

Neither of them voiced it, but both were aware that the evil was withdrawn, quiescent. No longer were their spirits braced in agonised resistance as if sucked at by a fearful force. They could turn their backs to the mummy-chamber.

"I tell you what I think it looks like," said Vynning in a normal voice; "the people who put the mummies here came in this way, or at any rate had a bolt-hole this end. When they'd deposited the show, they blocked it up, departed by the cave way, blocked one side up, and plastered it over, as we know. There was no other way of getting out but those two, as the corridor ends in mother-rock. I'm inclined to get down into the pit and try to loosen the stones in that square. But there's no saying if it leads to daylight."

"I say it leads to daylight," said Claudia ; "if it didn't . . . it . . . wouldn't have concentrated there. I'm coming down too!"

"Going to jump?" asked Vyning drily, smiling.

"Yes, if you'll catch me."

"It's too big a drop. Let's see if we can find something to make a rope of. Wait here," he added ; "I sha'n't be long."

"How tiresome you are!" said Claudia with a flashing smile. "I wouldn't mind sleeping in that place now!"

Vyning looked hard at her.

"What do you mean?" he asked, quick and low.

"Unity is strength," she evaded lightly.

An hour later a substantial rope had been evolved of strips of Nefertiti's yellowed household linen, which had been neatly packed in painted coffer, and which, twisted

and knotted, still had wonderful resisting power. Claudia sorrowed over having to use it, but as she said, life is more than linen, even a queen's. With a little tinkering Vyning removed the pole of the chariot from its socket. It was of mimosa wood, and perfectly sound ; and was long enough to reach across the bottle-neck entrance to the pit-room, with something over at each end. Then he fastened the linen rope to the middle of it, and cautiously lowered himself to the floor. As he touched bottom, Claudia, who had been throwing her light on the rope, since his torch was in his pocket, saw a long, bluish-grey blur against the far wall. She shuddered, but she knew that the diabolical hate of which it was the time-defying form, was defeated, and that its last stand against the way to freedom was without power of harm.

PART VI.

When, shortly after three in the morning, Vyning surveyed the tomb they had entered after hours of chiselling, light broke, though not yet the light of day. Twelve painted apes squatted on the walls of one of the chambers ; he recognised it by them as the tomb of Eye, who was a connection of King Akhenaten's, and one of his successors. He had made his peace with the priesthood of Thebes, and held royal court there. It was probably he who transported the bodies of the illustrious heretics from Tel el Amarna ; perhaps he had temporarily housed them in his own tomb. Then, realising that the fanaticism of the Amen-worshippers might go to any lengths of sacrilege, he had caused a secret sepulchre to be cut, between his tomb and another ; the openings into which, when it had received its royal occupants, had been closed and replastered. The tomb-cutters had come across a soft streak in the sandstone, and had taken advantage of it. Antiquarian digging must have caused the roof to fall in, said those who afterwards examined the place.

The cool air, blowing in from the desert through the wooden gate, came to Claudia and Vyning like the very breath of heaven.

The lock broke at the second assault, and they stood free under the failing stars.

With her hands clasped over Nefertiti's necklace, Claudia gazed above the cliff-crests

to the east. The sapphire of night was yielding now to the colourless darkness which is the presage of dawn. She did not move or speak.

"Has it been too much?" Vyning's voice was infinitely anxious. By the light of his torch her eyes, her necklace, and her dress all seemed to be of the same intense, dusky blue—blue of the sky-depths at night. Again there came to him the sense of deep peace as the eyes looked into his own.

"After all these ages!" she breathed softly.

Her voice seemed to him laden with heavenly mystery and knowledge. A profound humility possessed him ; he did not dare grasp at her meaning. His spirit soared in that exquisite peace.

"You were an unhappy man, dear king. I think this time you are going to be a happy one. Do you know why we won?"

He searched her steadfast face.

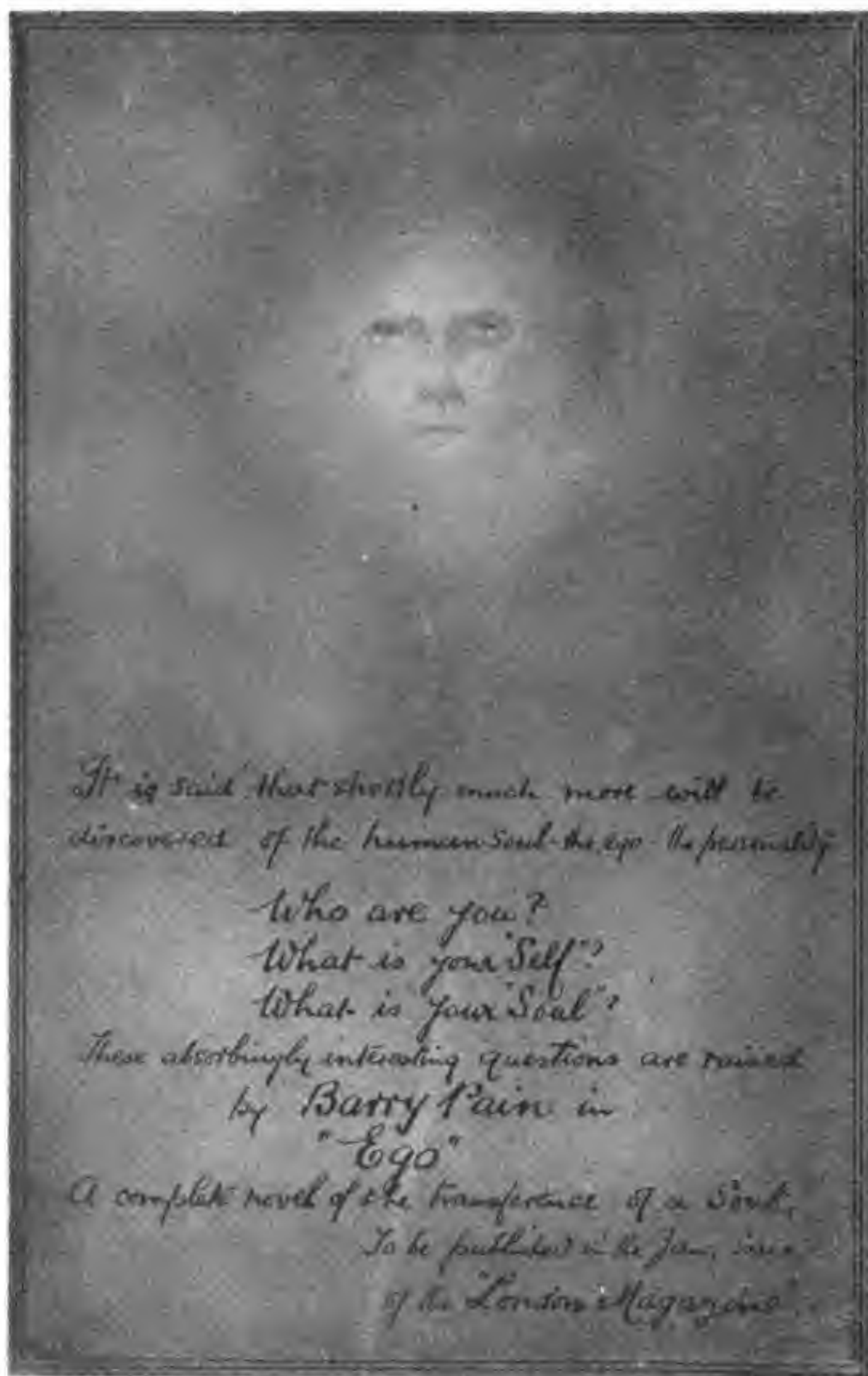
"We won, from the moment I let myself love you."

"I see now," he said, his voice shaken. . . . "I knew then that you saved me. But that was long ago—underground. Are you going to keep on letting yourself?"

Her glorious eyes were wet.

"It's a habit after all these ages," she said, with a little shrug and a look in which love and laughter mingled.

THE END.



THE EMPTY SLEEVE

A COMPLETE STORY BY ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

Illustrated by Fred Leist

THE Gilmer brothers were a couple of fussy and pernickety old bachelors of a rather retiring, not to say timid, disposition. There was grey in the pointed beard of John, the elder, and if any hair had remained to William it would also certainly have been of the same shade. They had private means. Their main interest in life was the collection of violins, for which they had the instinctive *flair* of true connoisseurs. Neither John nor William, however, could play a single note. They could only pluck the open strings. The production of tone, so necessary before purchase, was done vicariously for them by another.

The only objection they had to the big building in which they occupied the roomy top floor was that Morgan, liftman and caretaker, insisted on wearing a billycock with his uniform after six o'clock in the evening, with a result disastrous to the beauty of the universe. For "Mr. Morgan," as they called him between themselves, had a round and pasty face on the top of a round and comical body. In view, however, of the man's other rare qualities—including his devotion to themselves—this objection was not serious.

He had another peculiarity that amused them. On being found fault with, he explained nothing, but merely repeated the words of the complaint. For instance:

"Water in the bath wasn't really hot this morning, Morgan!"

"Water in the bath not reely 'ot, wasn't it, sir?"

Or, from William, who was something of a faddist:

"My jar of sour milk came up late yesterday, Morgan."

"Your jar sour milk come up late, sir, yesterday?"

Since, however, the statement of a complaint invariably resulted in its remedy, the brothers had learned to look for no further explanation. Next morning the

bath *was* hot, the sour milk *was* "brortup" punctually. The uniform and billycock hat, though, remained an eyesore and source of oppression.

On this particular night John Gilmer, the elder, returning from a Masonic rehearsal, stepped into the lift and found Mr. Morgan with his hand ready on the iron rope.

"Fog's very thick outside," said Mr. John pleasantly; and the lift was a third of the way up before Morgan had completed his customary repetition: "Fog very thick outside, yes, sir." And Gilmer then asked casually if his brother were alone, and received the reply that Mr. Hyman had called and had not yet gone away.

Now this Mr. Hyman was a Hebrew, and, like themselves, a connoisseur in violins, but, unlike themselves who only kept their specimens to look at, he was a skilful and exquisite player. He was the only person they ever permitted to handle their pedigree instruments, to take them from the glass cases where they reposed in silent splendour, and to draw the sound out of their wondrous painted bellies of golden varnish. The brothers loathed to see his fingers touch them, yet loved to hear their singing voices in the room, for the latter confirmed their sound judgment as collectors, and made them certain their money had been well spent. Hyman, however, made no attempt to conceal his contempt and hatred for the mere collector. The atmosphere of the room fairly pulsed with these opposing forces of silent emotion when Hyman played and the Gilmers, alternately writhing and admiring, listened. The occasions, however, were not frequent. The Hebrew only came by invitation, and both brothers made a point of being in. It was a very formal proceeding—something of a sacred rite almost.

John Gilmer, therefore, was considerably surprised by the information Morgan had supplied. For one thing, Hyman, he understood, was away on the Continent.

"Still in there, you say?" he repeated, after a moment's reflection.

"Still in there, Mr. John, sir." Then, concealing his surprise from the liftman, he fell back upon his usual mild habit of complaining about the billycock hat and the uniform.

"You really should try and remember, Morgan," he said, though kindly. "That hat does *not* go well with that uniform!"

Morgan's pasty countenance betrayed no vestige of expression. "'At don't go well with the yewniform, sir," he repeated, hanging up the disreputable bowler and replacing it with a gold-braided cap from the peg. "No, sir, it don't, do it?" he added cryptically, smiling at the transformation thus effected.

And the lift then halted with an abrupt jerk at the top floor. By somebody's carelessness the landing was in darkness, and, to make things worse, Morgan, clumsily pulling the iron rope, happened to knock the billycock from its peg so that his sleeve, as he stooped to catch it, struck the switch and plunged the scene in a moment's complete obscurity.

And it was then, in the act of stepping out before the light was turned on again, that John Gilmer stumbled against something that shot along the landing past the open door. First he thought it must be a child, then a man, then—an animal. Its movement was rapid yet stealthy. Starting backwards instinctively to allow it room to pass, Gilmer collided in the darkness with Morgan, and Morgan incontinently screamed. There was a moment of stupid confusion. The heavy framework of the lift shook a little, as though something had stepped into it and then as quickly jumped out again. A rushing sound followed that resembled footsteps, yet at the same time was more like gliding—someone in soft slippers or stockinged feet, greatly hurrying. Then came utter silence again. Morgan sprang to the landing and turned up the electric light. Mr. Gilmer, at the same moment, did likewise to the switch in the lift. Light flooded the scene. Nothing was visible.

"Dog or cat, or something, I suppose, wasn't it?" exclaimed Gilmer, following the man out and looking round with bewildered amazement upon a deserted landing. He knew quite well, even while he spoke, that the words were foolish.

"Dog or cat, yes, sir, or—something," echoed Morgan, his eyes narrowed to pin-points, then growing large, but his face stolid.

"The light should have been on." Mr. Gilmer spoke with a touch of severity. The little occurrence had curiously disturbed his equanimity. He felt annoyed, upset, uneasy.

For a perceptible pause the liftman made no reply, and his employer, looking up, saw that, besides being flustered, he was white about the jaws. His voice, when he spoke, was without its normal assurance. This time he did not merely repeat. He explained.

"The light *was* up, sir, when last I come up!" he said, with emphasis, obviously speaking the truth.

Mr. Gilmer, for some reason, felt disinclined to press for explanations. He decided to ignore the matter.

Then the lift plunged down again into the depths like a diving-bell into water; and John Gilmer, pausing a moment first to reflect, let himself in softly with his latchkey, and, after hanging up hat and coat in the hall, entered the big sitting-room he and his brother shared in common.

The December fog that covered London like a dirty blanket had penetrated, he saw, into the room. The objects in it were half shrouded in yellowish haze.

II.

In dressing-gown and slippers, William Gilmer, almost invisible in his armchair by the gas-stove across the room, spoke at once. Through the thick atmosphere his face gleamed, showing an extinguished pipe hanging from his lips. His tone of voice somehow conveyed emotion, an emotion he sought to suppress, of a quality, however, not easy to define.

"Hyman's been here," he announced abruptly. "You must have met him. He's this very instant gone out."

It was quite easy to see that something had happened, for "scenes" leave disturbance behind them in the very atmosphere. But John made no immediate reference to this. Conscious of an involuntary start impossible to prevent, he replied that he had seen no one—which was strictly true—and his brother thereupon, sitting bolt upright in the chair, turned quickly

and faced him. His face, in the foggy air, seemed paler than before.

"That's odd," he said nervously.

"What's odd?" asked John.

"That you didn't see—anything. You ought to have run into one another on the doorstep." His eyes went peering about the room. He was distinctly ill at ease. "You're positive you saw no one? Did Morgan take him down before you came? Did Morgan see him?" He asked several questions at once.

"On the contrary, Morgan told me he was still here with you. Hyman probably walked down, and didn't take the lift at all," he replied. "That accounts for neither of us seeing him." He decided to say nothing about the occurrence in the

lift, for his brother's nerves, he saw plainly, were on edge.

William then stood up out of his chair, and the skin of his face changed its hue, for whereas a moment ago it was merely pale, it had now altered to a tint that lay somewhere between white and a livid grey. The man was fighting internal terror. For a moment these two brothers of middle age looked each other straight in the eye. Then John spoke:

"What's wrong, Billy?" he asked quietly. "Something's happened to upset you. Tell me about it. What brought Hyman in this way—unexpectedly? I thought he was still in Germany."

The brothers, affectionate and sympathetic, understood one another perfectly. They had no secrets. Yet for several minutes the younger one made no reply. It seemed difficult to choose his words apparently.

"Hyman played, I suppose—on the fiddles?" John helped him, wondering uneasily what was coming. He did not care much for the individual in question, though his talent was of such great use to them.

The other nodded in the affirmative, then plunged into rapid speech, talking under his breath as though he feared someone might overhear. Glancing over his shoulder down the foggy room, he drew his brother close.

"Hyman came," he began, "unexpectedly. He hadn't written, and I hadn't asked him. You hadn't either. I suppose?"

John shook his head.

"When I came in from the dining-room I found him in the passage. The servant was taking away the dishes, and he had let himself in while the front door was ajar. Pretty cool, wasn't it?"

"He's an original," said John, shrugging his shoulders. "And you welcomed him?" he added.

"I asked him in, of course. He explained he had something glorious for me to hear. Silenski had played it in the



"DOG OR CAT, OR SOMETHING, I SUPPOSE, WASN'T IT?"
EXCLAIMED GILMER.

afternoon, and he had bought the music since. But Silenski's 'Strad' hadn't the power—it's thin on the upper strings, you remember, unequal, patchy—and he said no instrument in the world could do it justice but our 'Joseph'—the small Guarnerius, you know, which he swears is the most perfect in the world."

"And what was it? Did he play it?" asked John, growing more uneasy as he grew more interested. With relief he glanced round and saw the matchless little instrument lying there safe and sound in its glass case near the door.

"He played it—divinely: a Zigeuner Lullaby, a fine, passionate, rushing bit of inspiration, oddly misnamed 'lullaby.' And, fancy, the fellow had memorised it already! He walked about the room on tiptoe while he played it, complaining of the light——"

"Complaining of the light?"

"Said the thing was crepuscular, and needed dusk for its full effect. I turned the lights out one by one, till finally there was only the glow of the gas logs. He insisted. You know that way he has with him? And then he got over me in another matter; insisted on using some special strings he had brought with him, and put them on, too, himself—thicker than the A and E we use."

For though neither Gilmer could produce a note, it was their pride that they kept their precious instruments in perfect condition for playing, choosing the exact thickness and quality of strings that suited the temperament of each violin; and the little Guarnerius in question always "sang" best, they held, with thin strings.

"Infernal insolence!" exclaimed the listening brother, wondering what was coming next. "Played it well, though, didn't he, this Lullaby thing?" he added, seeing that William hesitated. As he spoke he went nearer, sitting down close beside him in a leather chair.

"Magnificent! Pure fire of genius!" was the reply with enthusiasm, the voice at the same time dropping lower. "Staccato like a silver hammer; harmonics like flutes, clear, soft, ringing; and the tone—well, the G string was a baritone, and the upper registers creamy and mellow as a boy's voice. John," he added, "that Guarnerius is the very pick of the period and"—again

he hesitated—"Hyman loves it. He'd give his soul to have it."

The more John heard, the more uncomfortable it made him. He had always disliked this gifted Hebrew, for in his secret heart he knew that he had always feared and distrusted him. Sometimes he had felt half afraid of him; the man's very forcible personality was too insistent to be pleasant. His type was of the dark and sinister kind, and he possessed a violent will that rarely failed of accomplishing its desire. Yet he was superstitious, too, into the bargain—a quality John loathed because he could not kill it in himself—for Hyman believed that there was some fluid portion of a man's personality which could be projected to a distance, and even semi-materialised there. The "astral body," he called it, or some such foolishness, claiming that it could appear in various forms, according to the character of its owner's desire, even in animal forms. And he was for ever talking about it.

"Wish I'd heard the fellow play," he said at length, ignoring his brother's last remark on purpose, and going on to speak of the most matter-of-fact details he could think of. "Did he use the Dodd bow, or the Tourte? That Dodd I picked up last month, you know, is the most perfectly balanced I have ever——"

He stopped abruptly, for William had suddenly got upon his feet and was standing there, searching the room with his eyes. A chill ran down John's spine as he watched him.

"What is it, Billy?" he asked sharply. "Hear anything?"

William continued to peer about him through the thick air.

"Oh, nothing probably," he said, an odd catch in his voice; "only—I keep feeling as if we were not quite alone, as if there was somebody listening. Do you think, perhaps"—he glanced over his shoulder—"there is someone at the door? I wish—I wish you'd have a look, John."

John obeyed, though without great eagerness. Crossing the room slowly, he opened the door, then switched on the light. The passage leading past the bathroom towards the bedrooms beyond was empty. The coats hung motionless from their pegs.

"No one, of course," he said, as he closed the door and came back to the stove. He left the light burning in the passage. It

was curious the way both brothers had this impression that they were not alone, though only one of them spoke of it.

"Used the Dodd or the Tourte, Billy—which?" continued John in the most natural voice he could assume.

But at that very same instant the water started to his eyes. There came to him a sensation that was literally—frightful. His brother, he saw, was close upon the thing he really had to tell. But he had stuck fast.

III.

By a great effort John Gilmer composed himself and remained in his chair. With detailed elaboration he lit a cigarette, staring hard at his brother over the flaring match while he did so. There he sat in his dressing-gown and slippers by the fireplace, eyes downcast, fingers playing idly with the red tassel. The electric light cast heavy shadows across the face. In a flash then, since emotion may sometimes express itself in attitude even better than in speech, the elder brother understood that Billy was about to tell him an unutterable thing.

By instinct he moved over to his side so that the same view of the room confronted him.

"Out with it, old man," he said with an effort to be natural. "Tell me what you saw."

Billy shuffled slowly round and the two sat side by side, facing the fog-draped chamber.

"It was like this," he began softly, "only I was standing instead of sitting, looking over to that door as you and I do now. Hyman moved to and fro in the faint glow of the gas logs against the far wall, playing that 'crepuscular' thing in his most inspired sort of way, so that the music seemed to issue from himself rather than from the shining bit of wood under his chin, when—I noticed something coming over me that was"—he hesitated, searching for



"THAT'S ODD," HE SAID NERVOUSLY. "YOU OUGHT TO HAVE RUN INTO ONE ANOTHER ON THE DOORSTEP." (Page 555.)

words—"that wasn't *all* due to the music," he finished abruptly.

"His personality put a bit of hypnotism on you, eh?"

William shrugged his shoulders.

"The air was thickish with fog and the light was dim, cast upwards upon him from the stove," he continued. "I admit all that. But there wasn't light enough to throw shadows, you see, and——"

"And you mean Hyman looked queer?" the other helped him quickly.

Billy nodded his head without turning.

"Changed there before my very eyes"—he whispered it—"turned animal——"

"Animal?" John felt his hair rising.

"That's the only way I can put it. His face and hands and body turned otherwise than usual. I lost the sound of his feet. When the bow-hand or the fingers on the strings passed into the light, they were"—he uttered a soft, shuddering little laugh—"furry, oddly divided, the fingers massed together. And he paced stealthily. I thought every instant the fiddle would drop with a crash and he would spring at me across the room."

"My dear chap—"

"He moved with those big, lithe, striding steps one sees"—John held his breath in the little pause, listening keenly—"one sees those big brutes make in the cages when their desire is aflame for food or escape, or— or fierce, passionate desire for anything they want with their whole nature—"

"The big felines!" John whistled softly.

"—And every minute getting nearer and nearer to the door, as though he meant to make a sudden rush for it and get out."

"With the violin! Of course you stopped him?"

"In the end. But for a long time, I swear to you, I found it difficult to know what to do, even to move. I couldn't get my voice for words of any kind; it was like a spell."

"It *was* a spell," suggested John firmly.

"Then, as he moved, still playing," continued the other, "he seemed to grow smaller; to shrink down below the line of the gas. I thought I should lose sight of him altogether. I turned the light up suddenly. There he was over by the door—crouching."

"Playing on his knees, you mean?"

William closed his eyes in an effort to visualise it again.

"Crouching," he repeated, at length, "close to the floor. At least, I think so. It all happened so quickly, and I felt so bewildered, it was hard to see straight. But at first I could have sworn he was half his natural size. I called to him, I think I swore at him—I forget exactly, but I know he straightened up at once and stood before me down there in the light"—he pointed across the room to the door—"eyes gleaming, face white as chalk, perspiring like midsummer, and gradually filling out, straightening up, whatever you like to call it, to his natural size and appearance again. He was the most horrid thing I've ever seen."

"As an—animal, you saw him still?"

"No; human again. Only much smaller."

"What did he say?"

Billy reflected a moment.

"Nothing that I can remember," he replied. "You see, it was all over in a few seconds. In the full light, I felt so foolish, and nonplussed at first. To see him normal again baffled me. And, before I could collect myself, he had let

himself out into the passage, and I heard the front door slam. A minute later—the same second almost, it seemed—you came in. I only remember grabbing the violin and getting it back safely under the glass case. The strings were still vibrating."

The account was over. John asked no further questions. Nor did he say a single word about the lift, Morgan, or the extinguished light on the landing. There fell a longish silence between the two brothers; and then, while they helped themselves to a generous supply of whisky-and-soda before going to bed, John looked up and spoke:

"If you agree, Billy," he said quietly, "I think I might write and suggest to Hyman that we shall no longer have need for his services."

And Billy, acquiescing, added a sentence that expressed something of the singular dread lying but half concealed in the atmosphere of the room, if not in their minds as well:

"Putting it, however, in a way that need not offend him."

"Of course. There's no need to be rude, is there?"

Accordingly, next morning the letter was written; and John, saying nothing to his brother, took it round himself by hand to the Hebrew's rooms near Euston. The answer he dreaded was forthcoming:

"Mr. Hyman's still away abroad," he was told. "But we're forwarding letters; yes. Or I can give you his address if you'll prefer it." The letter went, therefore, to the number in Königstrasse, Munich, thus obtained.

Then on his way back from the insurance company where he went to increase the sum that protected the small Guarnerius from loss by fire, accident, or theft, John Gilmer called at the offices of certain musical agents and ascertained that Silenski, the violinist, was performing at the time in Munich. It was only some days later, though, by diligent inquiry, he made certain that at a concert on a certain date the famous virtuoso had played a Zigeuner Lullaby of his own composition—the very date, it turned out, on which he himself had been to the Masonic rehearsal at Mark Masons' Hall.

John, however, said nothing of these discoveries to his brother William.



"HYMAN MOVED TO AND FRO IN THE FAINT GLOW OF THE GAS LOGS, PLAYING THAT 'CREPUSCULAR' THING IN HIS MOST INSPIRED SORT OF WAY." (*Page 557.*)

IV.

It was about a week later when a reply to the letter came from Munich—a letter couched in somewhat offensive terms, though it contained neither words nor phrases that could actually be found fault with. Isidore Hyman was hurt and angry. On his return to London a month or so later, he proposed to call and talk the matter over. The offensive part of the letter lay, perhaps, in his definite assumption that he could persuade the brothers to resume the old relations. John, however, wrote a brief reply to the effect that they had decided to buy no new fiddles; their collection being complete, and therefore there would be no occasion for them to invite his services as a performer. This was final. No answer came, and the matter seemed to drop. Never for one moment, though, did it leave the consciousness of John Gilmer. Hyman had said that he would come, and come assuredly he would. He secretly gave Morgan instructions that he and his brother for the future were always “out” when the Hebrew presented himself.

“He must have gone back to Germany, you see, almost at once after his visit here that night,” observed William, John making, however, no reply.

One night towards the middle of January the two brothers came home together from a concert in Queen’s Hall, and sat up later than usual in their sitting-room discussing over their whisky and tobacco the merits of the pieces and performers. It must have been past one o’clock when they turned out the lights in the passage and retired to bed. The air was still and frosty; moonlight over the roofs—one of those sharp and dry winter nights that now seem to have left London for ever.

“Like the old-fashioned days when we were boys,” remarked William, pausing a moment by the passage window and looking out across the miles of silvery, sparkling roofs.

“Yes,” added John; “the ponds freezing hard in the field, rime on the nursery windows, and the sound of a horse’s hoofs coming down the road in the distance, eh?” They smiled at the memory, then said good-night, and separated. Their rooms were at opposite ends of the corridor;

in between were the bathroom, dining-room, and sitting-room. It was a long, straggling flat. Half an hour later both brothers were sound asleep, the flat silent, only a dull murmur rising from the great city outside, and the moon sinking slowly to the level of the chimneys.

Perhaps two hours passed, perhaps three, when John Gilmer, sitting up in bed with a start, wide-awake and frightened, knew that someone was moving about in one of the three rooms that lay between him and his brother. He had absolutely no idea why he should have been frightened, for there was no dream or nightmare-memory that he brought over from unconsciousness, and yet he realised plainly that the fear he felt was by no means a foolish and unreasoning fear. It had a cause and a reason. Also—which made it worse—it was fully warranted. Something in his sleep, forgotten in the instant of waking, had happened to set every nerve in his body on the watch. He was positive only of two things—first, that it was the entrance of this person, moving so quietly there in the flat, that sent the chills down his spine; and, secondly, that this person was *not* his brother William.

John Gilmer was a timid man. The sight of a burglar, his eyes black-masked, suddenly confronting him in the passage, would most likely have deprived him of all power of decision—until the burglar had either shot him or escaped. But on this occasion some instinct told him that it was no burglar, and that the acute distress he experienced was not due to any message or ordinary physical fear. The thing that had gained access to his flat while he slept had first come—he felt sure of it—into his room, and had passed very close to his own bed, before going on. It had then doubtless gone to his brother’s room, visiting them both stealthily to make sure they slept. And its mere passage through his room had been enough to wake him and set these drops of cold perspiration upon his skin. For it was—he felt it in every fibre of his body—something evil.

The thought that it might at that very moment be in the room of his brother, however, brought him to his feet on the cold floor, and set him moving with all the determination he could summon towards the door. He looked cautiously down an utterly dark passage; then crept on



THAT CURVED SCIMITAR FLASHED ABOUT HIM, WITH SUCH MISDIRECTED VIOLENCE, THAT HE NOT ONLY FAILED TO STRIKE IT EVEN ONCE, BUT LOST HIS BALANCE AND FELL FORWARD FROM THE CHAIR. (*Page 562.*)

tiptoe along it. On the wall were old-fashioned weapons that had belonged to his father; and feeling a curved, sheathless sword that had come from some Turkish campaign of years gone by, his fingers closed tightly round it, and lifted it silently from the three hooks whereon it lay. He passed the doors of the bathroom and dining-room, making instinctively for the big sitting-room where the violins were kept in their glass cases. The cold nipped him. His eyes smarted with the effort to see in the darkness. Outside the closed door he hesitated.

Putting his ear to the crack, he listened. From within came a faint sound of someone moving. The same instant there rose the sharp, delicate "ping" of a violin-string being plucked; and John Gilmer, with nerves that shook like the vibrations of that very string, opened the door wide with a fling and turned on the light at the same moment. The plucked string still echoed faintly in the air.

The sensation that met him on the threshold was the well-known one that things had been going on in the room which his unexpected arrival had that instant put a stop to. A second earlier and he would have discovered it all in the act. The atmosphere still held the feeling of rushing, silent movement with which the things had raced back to their normal, motionless positions. The immobility of the furniture was a mere attitude hurriedly assumed, and the moment his back was turned the whole business, whatever it might be, would begin again. With this presentment of the room, however—a purely imaginative one—came another, swiftly on its heels.

For one of the objects, less swift than the rest, had not quite regained its "attitude" of repose. It still moved. Below the window-curtains on the right, not far from the shelf that bore the violins in their glass cases, he made it out, slowly gliding along the floor. Even as his eye caught it, it came to rest.

And, while the cold perspiration broke out all over him afresh, he knew that this still moving item was the cause both of his waking and of his terror. This was the disturbance whose presence he had divined in the flat without actual hearing, and whose passage through his room, while he yet slept, had touched every nerve in his

body as with ice. Clutching his Turkish sword tightly, he drew back with the utmost caution against the wall and watched, for the singular impression came to him that the movement was not that of a human being crouching, but rather of something that pertained to the animal world. He remembered, flash-like, the movements of reptiles, the stealth of the larger felines, the undulating glide of great snakes. For the moment, however, it did not move, and they faced one another.

The other side of the room was but dimly lighted, and the noise he made clicking up another electric lamp brought the thing flying forwards again—*towards himself*. At such a moment it seemed absurd to think of so small a detail, but he remembered his bare feet, and, genuinely frightened, he leaped upon a chair and swished with his sword through the air about him. From this better point of view, with the increased light to aid him, he then saw two things—first, that the glass case usually covering the Guarnerius violin had been shifted; and, secondly, that the moving object was slowly elongating itself into an upright position. Semi-erect, yet most oddly, too, like a creature on its hind legs, it was coming swiftly towards him. It was making for the door—and escape.

The confusion of ghostly fear was somehow upon him so that he was too bewildered to see clearly, but he had sufficient self-control, it seemed, to recover a certain power of action; for the moment the advancing figure was near enough for him to strike, that curved scimitar flashed and whirled about him, with such misdirected violence, however, that he not only failed to strike it even once, but at the same time lost his balance and fell forward from the chair whereon he perched—straight into it.

And then came the most curious thing of all, for as he dropped, the figure also dropped, stooped low down, crouched, dwindled amazingly in size, and rushed past him close to the ground like an animal on all fours. John Gilmer screamed, for he could no longer contain himself. Stumbling over the chair as he turned to follow, cutting and slashing wildly with his sword, he saw half-way down the darkened corridor beyond the large, scuttling outline of—a cat!

The door into the outer landing was

somehow ajar, and the next second the beast was out, but not before the steel had fallen with a dreadful crashing blow upon the front disappearing leg, almost severing it from the body.

It was dreadful. Turning up the lights as he went, he ran after it to the outer landing. But the thing he followed was already well away, and he heard, on the floor below him, the same oddly gliding, slithering, stealthy sound, yet hurrying, that he had heard weeks before when something had passed him in the lift, and Morgan, in his terror, had likewise cried aloud.

For a time he stood there on that dark landing, listening, thinking, trembling; then turned into the flat and shut the door. In the sitting-room he carefully replaced the glass case over the treasured violin, puzzled to the point of foolishness, utterly and strangely routed in his mind. For the violin itself, he saw, had been dragged several inches from its cushioned bed of plush.

Next morning, however, he made no allusion to the occurrence of the night. His brother apparently had not been disturbed.

V.

The only thing that called for explanation—an explanation not fully forthcoming—was the curious aspect of “Mr. Morgan’s” countenance. The fact that this individual gave notice to the owners of the building, and at the end of the month left for a new post, was, of course, known to both brothers; whereas the story he told in explanation of his face was known only to the one who questioned him about it—John. And John, for reasons best known to himself, did not pass it on to the other. Also, for reasons best known to himself, he did not cross-question the liftman about those singular marks, or report the matter to the police.

For Morgan’s pasty visage was badly scratched, and there were red lines running from the cheek into the neck that had the appearance of having been produced by sharp points, viciously applied—claws. He had been disturbed by a noise in the hall, he

said, about three in the morning. A scuffle had ensued in the darkness, but the intruder had got clear away. . . .

“A cat, or something of the kind, no doubt,” suggested John Gilmer at the end of the brief recital. And Morgan had replied in his usual way: “A cat, or something of the kind, Mr. John, no doubt.”

All the same, he had not cared to risk a second encounter, but had departed to wear his billycock and uniform in a building less haunted.

Hyman, meanwhile, made no attempt to call and talk over his dismissal. The reason for this was only apparent, however, several months later when, quite by chance, coming along Piccadilly in an omnibus, the brothers found themselves seated opposite to a man with a thick black beard and blue glasses. William Gilmer hastily rang the bell and got out, saying something half intelligible about feeling faint. John followed him.

“Did you see who it was?” he whispered to his brother the moment they were safely on the pavement.

John nodded.

“Hyman, in spectacles. He’s grown a beard, too.”

“Yes, but didn’t you also notice—”

“What?”

“He had an empty sleeve.”

“An empty sleeve?”

“Yes,” said William; “he’s lost an arm.”

There was a long pause before John spoke. At the door of their club the elder brother added:

“Poor devil! He’ll never again play on”—then, suddenly changing the preposition—

“*with* a pedigree violin!”

And that night in the flat, after William had gone to bed, he looked up a curious old volume he had once picked up on a second-hand bookstall, and read therein quaint descriptions of how the “desire-body of a violent man” may assume animal shape, operate on concrete matter even at a distance; and, further, how a wound inflicted thereon can reproduce itself upon its physical counterpart by means of the mysterious so-called phenomenon of “re-percussion.”

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD.





EGO

CHAPTER I.

DANIEL MYAS.

I MET Daniel Myas first in the winter of 1906, at Hamilton's house, in Paris. Hamilton married a Frenchwoman, and they lived in Paris for the greater part of the year. They were both terribly musical, and musicians of many nationalities came to the house. Conversation, on the days when Madame received, was tryingly polyglot for a plain Englishman like myself.

As often happens at a first meeting, one received an impression which was in part erroneous and in part short of the truth. Until he spoke to me, I thought that Myas was a Frenchman. His necktie was aggressively French. He used a little gesture. He had been speaking French to my hostess, and with a perfection that in an Englishman was almost unpatriotic. His talk with me was principally on the subject of the Paris restaurants; he seemed to have made a special study of the art of dining, and as a result of the experimental work he had slightly sacrificed his figure. He was rather under the medium height and powerfully built. His eye was vivacious and his expression kindly. I noticed his hands particularly; they were rather too white and well-shaped.

Just as I was leaving, I had a few words with my hostess about him. Madame was always amusing but not always accurate. She told me that I had been talking to a great savant. No, he was not always so sweet-tempered as he appeared. For example, he always swore at his manicurist; but then he sent her sweets from Rumpelmayer's to make up for it. If he interested me, would I not meet him at dinner there on the following Wednesday?

I accepted. And in this way began an acquaintance which I wish that I had never made.

In the course of the next month I saw Myas frequently. He knew Paris well, and showed me much that I had not seen before. He was generally interesting and sometimes amusing. One day he happened to speak, with a flash of that temper which Madame had led me to expect, of the extreme narrow-mindedness of medical men.

"Well, you are a medical man yourself, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "As a matter of fact, I am an M.D. of London, and at one time had a practice—a beastly practice in a beastly Somersetshire village. But as soon as I was in a position to give it up I did so, and that was two years ago. I came into some money on my father's death."

"I see," I said. "And as soon as you became independent, your interest in medical science ceased."

"Goodness, no! You might almost say that was when it began. It is that

which has kept me wandering round the foreign hospitals for the last two years. Research is absolutely lovely work. As a rule, it leads to nothing; when it does lead to anything, you get punished for it. You think you have found out something, you send a communication to the scientific Press, and you metaphorically get your head bashed for your pains by your distinguished and learned colleagues. But don't try to look as if you were interested in science. You can't be, you know. You belong to the leisured classes. Come along, and we will lunch at Ledoyen's."

However, I did not abandon the subject, and I gathered that the *Lancet* had spoken very unfavourably of some work of his. He was by way of making a joke of it, but it was quite obvious that in reality he was very sore about it.

He told me that he would be in London in the spring, and he promised that he would look me up then at my little bachelor flat in St. James's Place.

The day after my return to London, I happened to meet at the Club an old friend of mine, Dr. Habaden. He is a mighty physician, with a right to put a decoration on his evening coat on suitable occasions. I asked him if by any chance he knew a Dr. Myas.

"Daniel Myas?"

"That's him," I said, with the usual disregard of grammar.

"Yes, I know of him. As a student he did rather brilliantly. Got a resident appointment at his hospital. Quarrelled with everybody about everything, and had to go. Then he bought himself a practice, and that was how I came across him. He brought a patient up from Somersetshire to see me. I don't mind telling you that it was a devilish difficult case, and I found that Myas had diagnosed it correctly and treated it correctly."

"Did the patient recover?"

"No; died. But that's got nothing to do with it. He impressed me at the time as a very able man, quite beyond the run of the ordinary general practitioner. He's given up practice and taken up research now, and he's gone absolutely off the lines. You should see the kind of stuff that he's been writing. A ghoulish business, I call it."

"Ghoulish? How do you mean? What is it he does?"

"Dr. Daniel Myas is making a special investigation of the moment of death. You understand? He makes observations of dying people. When the thing is practically over, and a decent man would go away, down swoops Myas with his ophthalmoscope and his electro-cardiograph and all the rest of his bag of tricks, like a scientific vulture. I should suppose he's watched more deaths than any man living. Does his work abroad principally. And if the truth's told, he has tried some rum-funny experiments, too—things that would never be tolerated in any hospital this side of the Channel."

"I met him in Paris, you know, just the other day. He didn't tell me that he was interested in death, and I should have said he was much more interested in his dinner. In fact, he didn't impress me as a ghoul at all."

"Oh, I don't say he's a ghoul in ordinary life. He probably wouldn't talk shop to you. It's the man's work that is ghoulish."

"I thought that science had declared all research to be good, and that in the sacred cause of truth nothing was to be considered horrible or disgusting?"

"Yes, that may be so if the research is directed to any useful end. But what good do you suppose Myas is doing? He is simply wasting time. We know what life is and what death is."

"Do we?" I asked.

I knew the question would irritate Dr. Habaden, and it did.

"If you think you're going to lure me into one of your profitless metaphysical discussions, you're mistaken, my friend. The medical man knows when life

ends and death begins, and in the case of a patient who is past remedial aid that is all he needs to know. There is plenty of good work to be done, and as Myas has the time and the means he might just as well devote himself to it. What is the ætiology of disseminated sclerosis? What's the morbid anatomy of paralysis agitans? That's the kind of thing he ought to be telling us. Cancer isn't settled yet. I could name fifty things that might employ him usefully. He prefers to worry the last moments of poor devils for whom neither he nor anybody else can do anything. It's sheer perversity, and I hate to see a man of his abilities so much misled."

"Well," I said, "Myas will be coming to town in the spring, and I shall be seeing him. Shall I tell him what you think about him?"

"Do. Mind, it won't be any news to him. He's been rapped over the knuckles already. But I suppose he has some respect for my opinion, since he brought a patient to me, and I dare say he will believe that I am well disposed towards him."

"Very well," I said. "I'll tell him, and it's my belief that it won't make a pin's head of difference to him."

"Oh, that's very likely," grunted Dr. Habaden, and went on up to the billiard-room.

CHAPTER II.

HIS PROFESSION.

IT was one morning early in the following March that Myas called on me at my flat in St. James's Place. He had already been in London for some days, and said that he had got his work in Paris finished sooner than he had expected. He still wore flowing and abominable neckties, and a silk hat with a perfectly flat brim. In fact, he looked more like a French charlatan than an English gentleman; in the light of subsequent events I now know that he was neither. He was energetic and vivacious, and seemed a little triumphant. When I asked him what he was so pleased about, he said that things had gone rather well with him in Paris. Then he changed the subject, and began talking about the Hamiltons. They had gone to Rome for Easter, he told me. I think he was not naturally an egotistical man, although I did afterwards manage to make him talk a good deal about himself.

I took him off to the Club with me, and gave him a simple and unpretentious luncheon. He was pleased to be enthusiastic about it, and I told him that he was making a deal of unnecessary and unseemly fuss.

"Don't say that," he said. "Don't tell me that you belong to the illogical and nervous weaklings who are ashamed to eat and drink."

"Are there such people?"

"Of course there are. They're a feature of the age. They browse on breakfast cereals and drink ginger-beer. The way the consumption of alcohol is decreasing in this country is perfectly appalling."

He paused to take a cup of black coffee. He refused the liqueur, and proceeded:

"I have dined out a few times since I have been over here, and I have noticed things. One of the best wines is never drunk at all. It is always offered—apparently as a kind of ritual—and always refused. Although dinners have been made very much shorter, most women and some men refuse the joint. Dinner is becoming a farce. The really tragic thing about it is that these dyspeptic duffers seem to have the idea that their physical incapacity makes for refinement and mental improvement. It does nothing of the sort. Food for the body is food for the mind; the two are inseparably associated. Tell me now,

what period in English history produced the finest men—the finest statesmen, generals, admirals, artists ? ”

“ Well, I’m not a historian, but I suppose there is no dispute about that. Roughly speaking, the period would be the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries.”

“ Of course. And that was a hearty age. It was an age of beef and beer, and it was also an age of courage and invention, which is precisely what one would have expected. Pitt drank his two bottles of port, went into the House of Commons, and spoke magnificently. There was oratory in those days, and there was consequent enthusiasm. The modern member of Parliament sips barley-water and stutters statistics, mostly wrong, and national enthusiasm is at a low ebb, which is also what one would expect.”

“ I wonder if there is anything in all this ? ” I said.

“ It can hardly be otherwise. After all, the stomach is the one fundamental thing. It exists in the very lowest organisms, which have neither limbs nor brain. It is practically the first part of a man to get into working order. Its function is correct, before the baby can speak, or walk, or co-ordinate his movements. In fact, if I wanted to determine the Ego, I might be more likely to find the clue in the stomach than in the brain.”

“ Look here,” I said. “ What on earth do you mean by determining the Ego ? ”

“ Well, in what does your ‘ self ’ consist ? You would probably tell me that it consists in the association of your mind and your body. Now does it ? When the mind has practically vanished, and no longer suffices even for a man’s simplest needs, his life is still carefully preserved in an asylum. This would not be the case if it were not believed that the man’s self was still there. When the man’s body is dead and has decomposed, it is held by all religious people that the man’s self still persists—that his personality is continued in another world ; and perhaps science has rather more to say for this view than most men of science are aware. All of which is abominably dull talk after luncheon, isn’t it ? ”

“ Not to me,” I said. “ I have been getting rather interested in your work lately.”

“ You flatter me. And what do you know about it anyhow ? ”

“ I know what that great and good man Dr. Habaden has told me.”

“ Dr. Habaden is a perfectly sound man in his own line, which is rather a terrific thing to be. It is quite detrimental to a sense of proportion. He sees a few blades of grass and he misses the landscape. I suppose my distinguished and learned colleague damned me as usual ? ”

“ Oh, yes. Damned you very heartily, and told me to tell you so.”

“ Why ? ”

“ He thinks you are a man of great ability, wasting your time out of perversity. He says you ought to be studying the ætiology of insanity, or the cure of cancer, or some other problem which really does need solution. He also suggests that you worry the last moments of dying patients, when they ought to be left at peace.”

“ Seems to have been saying a lot of sweet things about me,” said Myas grimly. “ Well, I needn’t bother you with it. It’s not your business. You belong to the leisured classes.”

“ You accused me of that before. It is true that I have no profession, and the only profession I ever wanted to have was not medical. But all the same I——”

“ Hold on,” said Myas. “ What was it you wanted to go in for ? ”

“ Army. The doctors wouldn’t pass me. Ten years ago my people tried to get me to go into Parliament, but I had no ambitions that way. Still, I’ve

got lots of friends, and I'm keen on lots of things, and I do occasionally think. Of course, I don't know what your work is, but if it lies in the direction of the determination of self——"

"That is precisely it."

"Then it must be very interesting. Every man who thinks at all must ask himself sometimes, 'What am I?' And he has not got the answer."

"Look here, you should ask my esteemed colleague Dr. Habaden that. Put it in another form, and ask him what life and death are."

"I did," I said, "and he was pretty sick about it. He said that he knew when life ended and death began, and that was all we needed to know."

"Well, I deny that. I say there is no limit to what we need to know. I say too that the very first things which we need to know are the great elemental things. Let me know exactly in what 'self' consists. Let me be able to isolate 'self' from its usual concomitants of mind and body, and I have no doubt that all the minor points, about which Habaden is so desperately anxious, will be added unto it. It seems to me that he wants me to begin at the wrong end of the stick."

"It comes to this," I said. "You're trying to comprehend—to capture—the human soul."

Myas glanced at his watch.

"That is the theologian's name for it," he said. "Names don't matter anyhow. I'm due at the hospital, and must be off now. I'll tell you how the thing goes later if you like."

"Do," I said. "I want to hear about it."

CHAPTER III.

I AM PROMISED A DEMONSTRATION.

FOR a fortnight I did not see Dr. Myas, and heard nothing from him. I had not got his address, or I should certainly have written to him. I was extremely annoyed about it. He had promised to let me hear more of the very curious and interesting work on which he was engaged, and I was anxious to hear more.

I am not an erudite man, and I am not a philosopher. And I had been puzzled by a point on which neither the erudite nor the philosophical seemed to help me at all. I refer to the way the mind acts on the body and the body on the mind.

A small piece of paper is placed on the hand of a man who has been hypnotised, and he is told that this will produce a blister. The blister does actually appear, but it is mind and not a piece of paper which has caused it. Every doctor knows how important in some cases the mental attitude of a patient is. With a fixed determination to recover, and a belief that he will recover, recovery does take place. Without this determination and belief, the man sinks and dies. It is as true that body acts on mind. A certain state of the liver produces unfounded melancholy. A certain state of the lungs produces an equally unfounded hope—the characteristic *spes phthisica*. Everybody knows these things, but so far I had found no satisfactory explanation of them.

I asked a physiologist what was the connection between mind and body, and where was the bridge between them. He told me that they were not connected in any way, but merely associated, much as the shadow is associated with the thing which casts the shadow.

I put this view before a well-known metaphysician, a man who spoke of all practical science with gentle contempt. "Yes," he said, "that is about right. But which is the shadow?"

This was not very illuminative. But if, as Myas had affirmed, both mind and body were but concomitants of the soul or self, it was easy to see how through the soul the one might affect the other. Of course Myas had proved nothing, he had given me no details, he had narrated no special discovery of his which had led him to take this conclusion. He had already shown me, in the way that he discussed the question of diet, a distinct preference for the unaccepted view; and this preference is often a source of weakness. Still, I was intrigued. I wanted to hear what he had to say.

I hope that the above does not give any false impression of myself. I am no profound student of such questions. I pretend to be no more than just an ordinary man of the world. But even to the most ordinary it seems to me that such things must occasionally offer both an interest and a perplexity. It does not destroy one's interest in politics or in bridge; it does not spoil one's fondness for sport, or upset one's convictions as to the way a man should deport himself; but it does occur to the mind now and again, at odd moments.

Consequently, I was rather glad, as I was walking down Piccadilly one Monday afternoon, to hear behind me the deep and sonorous voice of Dr. Myas calling me by name.

I shook hands with him, and told him that he had treated me abominably, and that on the whole he had better go to the devil.

"My dear Compton," said Myas, "if I have treated you badly, it is only because other people have treated me much worse. You see before you a martyr to science. I am going as far as the fruit-shop and then across the parks, and you might as well come with me."

"Sha'n't!" I said. "I'm going on to Knightsbridge."

But as a matter of fact I did go with him as far as St. James's Park Station. At the fruit-shop opposite the Green Park he purchased roses and strawberries. I heard the address to which they were to be sent, and I told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself.

"You have an absolutely evil mind," said Myas. "She was by way of polishing my nails, and incidentally she polished off the whole of the first joint of my fingers with wash-leather and pumice. If you like that kind of thing I don't. It hurts. I swore and she wept. Hence the strawberries."

"That's a very silly story," I said. "I'd sooner hear who has been ill-treating you scientifically, and how."

"You remember that when I last left you I was going to keep an appointment at the hospital with which I was at one time connected. I wanted to obtain there certain facilities for my experimental work. I was refused. At any rate I was so hedged in with conditions and qualifications that the thing became impossible for me. I have tried other hospitals with a similar result. That is the way the scientific investigator is treated in this rotten country."

"All right," I said. "If you don't like it, why don't you leave it? Skip back to Paris. That hat of yours would feel a good deal more at home there."

"No," said Myas decidedly. "Here they take no serious interest in my work, but in Paris they take just a little too much. Everything I do is watched. Inquiries are frequent. If I went back to Paris, some man would take advantage of my preliminary work, and possibly get to the goal before me."

"You were quite right when you told me that men of your profession were narrow-minded. You are a case in point. What on earth does it matter who makes a discovery, so long as the discovery is made? You're not a scientific martyr at all. You're only selfish and greedy. What do you say to that?"

"I don't pretend to transcend human nature. If somebody managed to sneak your watch, you would not say that so long as somebody enjoyed the watch it didn't matter who it was. You also would be selfish and greedy."

"But then I'm not posing as a scientific martyr. Hospitals are not

established solely for research, and I have not the least doubt that you wanted something which was quite improper and illegitimate. Now what are you going to do about it? Have you got a plan at all?"

"I have. Some time ago I made the mistake of showing children and fools half-finished work. That is to say I allowed my distinguished and learned colleagues to see some of the results of my investigations, and the deductions I had made from them. That broke the first commandment, which is that you shall make no new departure. You may continue work which has already been begun, and may make fresh discoveries in it, and be complimented and K.C.V.O.'d. But originality and imagination are the unforgivable sins. Very well then. I shall publish nothing further at present. I shall continue my work here as best I can, and wait until I can give an absolute demonstration of my determination of the Ego. The fact which they can see and test must convince."

"When you spoke of this before you said that mind and body were but the usual concomitants of self or soul, and that neither separately nor in association did they constitute self or soul."

"Something of the kind," said Myas. "Extraordinary that you should have remembered it."

"Not at all. I am interested. Now if science had chosen to deny, say, the existence of sheep, I can understand that you could produce the sheep and demonstrate it. But I do not see how you are to demonstrate the existence of the human soul."

"Don't you? I have given up explaining my work now. I will be judged by results. And I tell you this definitely—before this year is out I will demonstrate the existence of the soul to you personally."

"If you mean that seriously I'm quite content."

"I do. And here by the way is my station."

Before we separated I asked him for his address. I was not quite sure which of our hotels could reach the high standard of luxury that Myas demanded. He told me that he was living at 121, Knox Street, which he described as a back street in the Walham Green neighbourhood. He said that he had four rooms over a shop there. The shop sold newspapers and tobacco, and was kept by a widow, Mrs. Lade, and her daughter. In the intervals of attendance on the shop, they gave him such attendance as he required for his rooms.

I was astonished of course. In Paris the best hotels had struggled in vain to be good enough for Dr. Myas. Here he had taken lodgings in a back street in Fulham, with a widowed tobacconist to wait on him. I supposed it was some fantastic whim of his, and would not gratify him by asking any questions about it. I only said sardonically that he seemed determined to be right in the centre of things.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. MYAS TAKES ROOMS IN FULHAM.

WHEN I accepted Myas's invitation to dine with him at the Ritz a few days later, I did so with my eyes open. "I am bringing with me," his letter said, "a Mr. Vulsame, a young surgeon who is in practice not far from here. He will be having a great treat, and I can remember your saying that the young man who is having a great treat is a nuisance. Briefly, Vulsame would not suit your fastidious taste. At the same time, I shrink from spending a whole evening with him by myself, and you would be a great help. I believe that under a highly conventional exterior you conceal some slight kindness of heart, or I would not venture to ask it. Do come and lend a hand with the beggar." I replied that I would be charmed.

Myas himself was at his very best and perfectly delightful, but frankly it was rather an awful evening. Vulsame had good looks of rather a coarse and common kind, and his dress and manners were enough to make the angels weep. He called me "sir" previous to the champagne and "old cock" afterwards. He really was most deleterious. Somewhere about nine o'clock we got him to a music-hall, where his comments on women and life were very Rabelaisian. Throughout the evening Myas showed much tact in his management of the man. I think it was my good fortune to please Mr. Vulsame; at any rate he asked me to drop in some evening in a friendly way, an invitation which I cordially accepted without any intention of availing myself of it. They went on to supper somewhere or other afterwards, but I thought I had done enough for Dr. Myas for one night, and pleaded an engagement.

During the whole evening Myas made no reference of any kind to his work, nor did I gather why he had taken lodgings in Fulham, or why he was so desperately anxious to give Mr. Vulsame a great treat. However, it was none of my business, and I did not trouble myself about it.

One day in the following week, while I was at lunch in my rooms, the telephone bell went. My man, who attended to it, brought me word that Dr. Myers wished to speak to me. "I said that I would inquire if you were in," the man added.

I guessed of course that Myers was telephonic for Myas, and went to hear what he had to say. He told me that he was very much depressed and worried, and that it would do him good to see some normal and commonplace person like myself. Would I come and see his new rooms?

As it happened, I had a blank afternoon, and I said that I would come with pleasure.

I told the driver of the taxicab to take me to Walham Green. There I dismissed him, and proceeded on foot in search of 121, Knox Street. I wanted to take a leisurely view of the neighbourhood, with which I was unfamiliar.

Knox Street is dull, and grey, and narrow. It contains many shops, and most of them look as if they were on the verge of bankruptcy. Everything in the windows seemed to be offered at sacrificial prices and far under cost. Each shop displayed notices of a familiar and even slangy character. "Here's a Sunday dinner for you!" was one of them. Mrs. Lade seemed to be doing rather better than some of her neighbours. She offered for sale many different things. The solid basis of the trade was apparently penny novelettes and Woodbine cigarettes, but it also branched out into sweetmeats and mouth-organs.

There was no private door and I entered the shop. Had I been dishonestly inclined, I might have snatched up a couple of mouth-organs and made a bolt for it. Nobody was there to prevent me. But from behind a door, which was half a window with a red curtain over it, at the back of the shop, there came voices. The first voice was, I diagnosed correctly, the voice of a fat and elderly woman.

"It may be all right, but it don't look right, and if I was doing my duty I shouldn't allow it to go on."

The second voice was much younger and rather plaintive. Despite a pronounced London accent, it was not unpleasant in quality.

"I'm sure he always treats me with respect—with most perfect respect. And why I should miss a chance of improving myself I can't see. It's most kind of him. And I can tell you this, he's not a gentleman that will stand much interference—not from nobody. If you want to lose the rent, paid regular as it is——"

"Setting up there for hours with him like that!" said the fat voice indignantly. "I don't call it——"

I thought the time had come to rap sharply on the floor with my umbrella.

Through the red-curtained door came Mrs. Lade. She looked a conscientious, kindly, rather worried woman. She was fat and moved slowly. With a fold of her grey apron she concealed her red hands from the glance of the curious.

"Dr. Myas?" I said.

"Were you wishful to see him?"

"Yes," I said. "That was the idea. I am Mr. Compton."

Mrs. Lade opened the red-curtained door again and called to an invisible Miss Lade: "Gentleman to see Dr. Myas. Just take him up, Alice, will you?" Then she raised a flap of the counter and turned to me. "If you'll step this way, sir."

I stepped that way, and behind the red-curtained door I found a very beautiful girl. Her hair reminded me of the days in my extreme youth when I kept silkworms; it was just the colour of the natural silk, and she had any amount of it. Her eyes were a greyish-blue. When she saw an actual stranger and spoke with him, it was apparently her habit to blush slightly. She took me up some very dingy stairs and tapped at a door. The deep voice of Myas bade us come in.

Myas flung down the book that he was reading, and shook hands with me. I noticed, by the way, that the book was "Alice in Wonderland." I took one of his cigarettes, and sat down to talk to him.

"Before we go any further," I said, "tell me how is our dear friend, Mr. Vulsame?"

Myas grinned in a melancholy way. "I managed him beautifully. I gave him supper. I brought him back here in a taxicab. I kept him here for an hour, and took him to his own place in another taxicab. And it was really not until he reached home that he was actually drunk."

"It seemed to me that he was rather nearer that blessed condition than I cared about most of the evening."

"No, I assure you," said Myas. "Even when he got to his own home he was not incapable, and he was very, very happy. Speaking seriously, I'm awfully obliged to you for helping me with him. He's rather a useful man to me."

"Useful? How?"

"Vulsame has a practice. I am a qualified doctor. Vulsame occasionally has cases which are of interest to me, and have a bearing on my work. When that happens I am Mr. Vulsame's assistant. And when I am Mr. Vulsame's assistant I do exactly as I think right. When I came here, my friend, I did not do it merely to surprise you. There is a poor neighbourhood here. With the expenditure of a very few sovereigns I can get what I want. The relatives actually like it; it gives them so much money to spend on the funeral baked-meats."

"You're a gruesome beast, Myas," I said. I looked round the room. The walls were newly papered in a flat tint. The furniture was all new, not strictly artistic, but fairly good and comfortable. "You didn't find all these things here when you came, did you?" I asked.

"Lord, no. The rooms were empty. I went to Tottenham Court Road, gave them a rough idea of what I wanted and the price I would pay, and Tottenham Court Road did the rest. As long as the stuff was comfortable, and none of the things had any pattern on them, I did not mind much."

"What's your objection to pattern?"

"All pattern is an abomination. It annoys you because it is repeated. And then, where it has to stop because there is no more of the blessed curtain or wallpaper, it annoys you because it is not repeated. It reminds me too much of my fellow men—so many of them and all just alike. Now you, of course, would suffer patterns gladly."

"I don't worry. I'm not particularly cracked about anything of that kind. Why should I enjoy patterns?"

"The thing's obvious. Your one aim in life is to resemble as closely as

possible every other man in the same position in life, and their aim is to resemble each other and you. Any one of you would sooner commit a murder than wear the wrong necktie. Not cracked? Of course you're cracked."

"And you're quite sane I suppose."

"Absolutely," said Myas with conviction.

"Very well, then. How's that girl getting on with her lessons?"

"Go to the devil!" said Myas.

CHAPTER V.

HE FINDS AN ASSISTANT.

"LOOK here," said Myas, "you've got to see the rest of this bachelor establishment." He opened the folding-doors at the end of the room.

"Here, for example, we have my dining-room—furnished by Tottenham Court Road for £35, and looking exactly like a dining-room which has been furnished by Tottenham Court Road for £35."

"What do you want a dining-room for?" I said. "You can't possibly feed here."

"Can and do," said Myas.

I walked to the window. It was one of those windows that open down to the ground. From it an iron staircase led down to a narrow strip of ground which made faint struggles to be a garden. There were two old mulberry-trees in it. There was also a newly erected building, looking somewhat like a studio. I asked Myas what it was.

"That's where I do my work. That door in the wall at the further end of the garden opens into Durnford Place. When you come to see me again, as I hope you will, you must come in that way. Then you can come up to my rooms without going through Mrs. Lade's part of the house. I'll give you a latchkey."

I pocketed the latchkey, and said that the confidence that he showed in me was pleasing. "What I shall do of course will be to let myself in and burgle your workroom. There I shall reap the fruit of your researches, anticipate your discoveries, and subsequently enjoy the fame which you wrongly suppose is coming to you."

"You couldn't do it. You are far too much of a duffer at that kind of thing. What you found inside the workroom would be incomprehensible to you. For that reason I won't trouble you with the workroom at present. Could you be bothered to climb up more stairs in order to see the most absolutely ordinary bedroom that Tottenham Court Road has ever achieved?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, there is one thing more you must see, just across the passage here." He opened a door. "This is my kitchen—electric as you observe."

"And does she cook here?"

"No, idiot. The cooking which is done here I do myself."

"Well," I said, "you've put in electric light and electric heating and a telephone. Probably in six months you'll be sick of this, and will start off on your travels again. Do you suppose you'll ever see your money back?"

"No, my practical friend, I don't. But I wanted to live here, and I had to make it possible. After all, living here is absurdly cheap. It cost me twenty times as much in Paris."

He seemed very pleased with the electrical toys in his kitchen, and insisted on showing me how they worked, although I told him that he was becoming very wearisome. Then we went back into the sitting-room, and he rang the bell for tea.

It was Miss Lade who brought the things in and arranged them on a low table by the fire. Myas stopped her as she was turning to go.

"Do wait and pour out tea for us," he said. "I want to present to you a great friend of mine, Mr. Compton."

She murmured something unintelligible, and seemed a little in doubt whether she should shake hands. I settled the question for her. Her hands did not look as if she did much rough work.

I believe it is said to be the test of a gentleman that he is at ease under all circumstances and in all society. If this be the case, I am emphatically not a gentleman. At this extraordinary tea-party I was not at my ease at all. I did my best, but it was poor. I wanted to talk to Miss Lade—and not only because she was a very pretty girl—and the only mutual ground that I could find on which we might meet was the mulberry-trees in the garden. At the time of the Revolution French exiles came to London and there planted mulberry trees, notably in St. John's Wood, and to a lesser extent in Fulham. So I told her, and I dare say it may be true. I heard with great interest that the mulberries did actually ripen, and I made her promise to send me some of them in due season. She was certainly very shy, but, I should say, appeared considerably less of a fool than I did. She poured out tea very nicely. Myas said very little, and did not help a bit.

After a while things went more easily, and I got her to talk about herself, and about lawn-tennis, and about theatres to which she had been. She had a very pleasant voice, and great simplicity—a thing which I have always especially admired. I should think she was with us for about half an hour. Then she rose, and said that her mother was going out, and that she would have to attend to the shop. When I tried to help her in removing the tea-things, she said that I was clumsy, and would not let me do anything. Myas did not attempt to do anything. He sat back in his easy-chair, and watched us through the smoke of his cigarette, as if we were doing an interesting scene in a play.

"Well?" he said, when she had gone.

"Leave her alone," I said.

Then he spoke, with a good deal of emphasis, almost with excitement.

"Look here, my dear fellow, you misunderstand this altogether. I don't blame you for that. You take the ordinary view, and any other man of your blessed pattern would take the same. I'll go further than that. If you were in my position, I should give you exactly the same advice that you have just given me. But, as it happens, what you say is absolutely beside the point. The things that you imagine are not concerned in the question in the least. I'm not going to make love to that girl. Understand that definitely. I told you over the telephone that I was worried and depressed, and so I am; and that girl is principally concerned in it, but most emphatically not for the reason which you would suppose."

"I'm no good at mysteries," I said. "If the trouble is not what I think, I don't pretend to understand what it is. But I do profess to know something about human nature. Your intentions are excellent, of course. But in a case like this there is often a marked difference between a man's intentions and his conduct. I will flatter you so far as to tell you that you're not an ordinary man. Still, you're a human being."

"Admitted. I do not profess to have lived the life of an anchorite hitherto. But I am telling you the exact truth when I say that nothing exists now for me but my work, and that this girl troubles me only in so far as she is connected with my work. And if I do as I wish, she will be very intimately connected with it."

"Oh, very well!" I said. "But there's another thing to think about. For

the last half-hour or so I have been watching that girl in here. If she is not very much in love with you, I'm mistaken, and I know nothing."

Myas seemed to reflect for a minute. Then he said, with conviction :

"I hope she is. I hope to goodness she is. If she is not, she is not likely to be of much use to me."

"I give it up. I don't understand you."

"No," said Myas. "But you will one of these days."

"How?"

"How?" echoed Myas. "Well, you will understand, because either that girl or myself will give you the explanation."

As I rose to go I pressed him to come and see me sometime. He said that he would if he could, but that he was very busy now, and it was a long way to come.

"It is," I said. "But I should like to point out that the distance from Knox Street to St. James's Place is exactly the same as the distance from St. James's Place to Knox Street, which distance I have covered this very afternoon."

He said that I was a man of leisure, and that time, distance, and taxicabs were all as nothing to me. I was to come again. He generally knocked off work for an hour or two in the afternoon. I had my latchkey.

I left him with the uncomfortable feeling that I had been spending the afternoon with a blackguard, not the typical deceiver and seducer—on the whole, I acquitted him of that—but another type of blackguard, a man absolutely unscrupulous where his work was concerned. Perhaps I should say, rather, a man who was trying to force himself to become unscrupulous.

About a month later I rang up Myas on the telephone, and suggested that I should come to see him that afternoon. He replied that he was very sorry, but that work which it was impossible to leave would occupy him the whole of that afternoon. He would come to see me.

But he did not come to see me. It was in June that I received from him a rather curious letter, in which he announced his engagement to Alice Lade.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ENGAGEMENT.

MYAS said in his letter that the news of his engagement would probably give me a comfortable feeling of superiority, I having always known, of course, what would happen. With this would be mingled a certain regret that he had not allied himself more advantageously from the world's point of view. And both feelings, he assured me, would be quite out of place.

"The fact is," he wrote, "that it had become necessary for the purposes of my work for Miss Lade and myself to be frequently together for long periods. Knox Street shook its respectable head, and Mrs. Lade did not like it. The proclamation of an engagement, and the purchase of an absurdly valuable ring, have changed all this. Knox Street smiles upon us, and dreams confetti. Mrs. Lade is quite happy. Briefly, the engagement is simply the price we pay to Knox Street for permission to continue our work as before. So if you have any impression that you ever foresaw anything, you should correct it. I think it improbable that we shall ever be married. But that depends to some extent on the result of the great experiment."

"Meanwhile, as I require the whole of Miss Lade's time, I have provided a domestic substitute, to Mrs. Lade's great satisfaction. The work has gone on very

rapidly, and the day is not far off now. You might come and see me to-morrow afternoon."

On looking into the matter, I found that I had made two appointments for the following afternoon. I had promised to go with the Hamiltons, who were in town for a few days, to the Queen's Hall, and I had also promised to play bridge with some other people. That made it all quite easy. I excused myself from the bridge-party on the ground that I had forgotten about the Hamiltons, and from the Hamiltons on the ground that I had forgotten about the bridge-party. These two appointments being safely and easily cancelled, I got into a taxicab and drove to Durnford Place.

I let myself in with the latchkey that Myas had given me, and went up the strip of garden. As I passed the workroom, I heard within a chink of glass and a light footstep. I hesitated a moment, thinking that Myas might be there; but I remembered that when he showed me the rest of his establishment, he had rather made a point of not showing me the workroom. So I went on up the iron staircase, and tapped at the window. Myas himself let me in.

"Come to deliver your congratulations?" he asked, rather sardonically.

"No. I've come to ask you to explain yourself."

"But, my dear fellow, what is there to explain? It all seems to me so simple and natural."

"What do you mean by saying that it had become necessary for you and Miss Lade to be together for long periods? The thing is absolute nonsense. What possible use can she be to you in your work? She has certainly had no scientific education. She has probably had precious little education of any kind."

At this moment the door opened, and Miss Lade entered. She addressed herself to Myas, speaking eagerly and quickly: "The variation is three seconds and two-fifths."

As she spoke she saw me. She greeted me cordially enough, and shook hands, but instantly turned back again to Myas.

"Yes," said Myas, "that's too much, isn't it?"

"I thought," she said, "of trying again with ether alone."

"Yes," he said, "you might certainly try that. Do. You'll be through with it by tea-time."

"I expect so," she said, and went out of the room again. I think I have never before in my life experienced more completely the sensation that I did not matter in the least.

"Let's see," said Myas, "you were beginning to talk about education, weren't you? Sorry for the interruption. I've got views about education."

"Oh, you've got views on everything under the sun."

"The London season's telling on your nerves, Compton. You incline to be irritable. I do not think, speaking quite dispassionately, that Alice Lade is exactly what you would have expected from her parentage and position in life."

"Obviously she's not. I admit all that."

"It is true, as you say, that her education was of the very slightest. That was all the better from my point of view. I had no rubbish to clear away. Nothing on earth is quite so easy to understand as what is popularly called science. The only way that men have been able to make it at all difficult is by inventing a very frantic terminology, which they habitually mispronounce, and by carefully suppressing all habit of simple and lucid speech. Education for the child means a march into the unknown. He is told that he has to do quadratic equations, but nobody ever dreams of telling him why. He has to know the name of the capital of Portugal. He has, in extreme cases, to know the names of the kings of Israel and Judah. The patience of the child is remarkable. He really does consent to lumber up his mind with all this

nonsense, merely because papa, or the governess, or the schoolmaster wishes him to do it. It is a wonderful thing that any horse consents to draw any cart, but it is still more wonderful that any child consents to acquire any knowledge, on the lines on which knowledge is now generally imparted. When you start on a journey, it is advisable to know where you're going, and you do not journey with much purpose or enthusiasm if you do not know it. One of the very first things I did with Miss Lade was to show her what I was aiming at, and how she could help."

"I see," I said. "You told her that you were aiming at the determination of the Ego, and she understood all that at once. Naturally, she would."

"Don't be an ass! That was, of course, what I told her, but equally, of course, those were not the words which I used. I asked her what she was, why she was here, and what would happen when she died. She told me that she was a girl, that she was here to do her duty, and that she would go to hell if she did not do it. As soon as I began to show her how far from satisfactory these answers were, she became interested. These simple elemental things interest everybody, even you. We know of course very little about them at present, and the prospect that she and I would be able to discover more naturally attracted Alice. But I am not taking all the credit for my way of teaching. She is intelligent, plastic, receptive, to a very unusual degree. Many things she seems to acquire unconsciously. For instance, her talk—you noticed it?"

"Yes, I noticed it. And now, my friend, suppose we look at it from her point of view. Does she understand that her engagement to you is merely a farce, and that you have no intention of carrying it out?"

"But that is not the case. I have every intention of carrying it out if it is possible. But the result of my experiment may make it impossible. I don't want to go into the question with you now. But I admit there is a very grave risk in the experiment."

"And she is to take part in it?"

"Certainly. Why not? She wishes it. She is absolutely devoted to me, and for that reason alone she would do it; but by this time she shares my eagerness for knowledge. I admit that I was reluctant at first. I was worried and depressed about it, as you remember. But now I am quite decided. After all, I have put no compulsion upon her. And she runs no risk which I shall not share equally with her. And this reminds me that I want to ask a favour of you. I have just made my will."

"Don't for goodness' sake say that you want me to be a trustee. I am trustee for three people already. They all liked me once, but they all hate me now. And they're all convinced that if I were not a curious combination of knave and fool, I could get them seven per cent. out of trust securities."

"Well, I do want you to be a trustee. I am leaving everything in trust for Miss Lade. I promise you that she will give you no trouble whatever. You will find her perfectly reasonable and docile."

After some discussion, I gave way and consented. And then Miss Lade came in again from the workroom.

"Well?" said Myas.

She shook her head. "No use at all. Worse than before." And then she turned to talk to me.

Certainly, the change in her in a very short time was remarkable. She was self-possessed, and only blushed once—when I congratulated her on her engagement. It was easy to talk to her. Her voice was pleasant and musical, and I thought her perfectly charming.

Myas came down the garden with me when I left. I said to him: "Do you mean to tell me that you're not in love with her?"

"Undoubtedly I shall be if all goes well. At present there is too much to think about. I haven't the time for love. Why, I've never even kissed her."

"If I were you, I should go back now and do it. Believe me, it doesn't take long."

"It would be absolute ruin," said Myas.

CHAPTER VII.

I RECEIVE A TELEGRAM.

DURING the next fortnight I saw a good deal of Myas and Miss Lade, and got to know the latter much better. The more I saw of her the higher my opinion of her became. She had great abilities, but even so her acquirements and her advance during the last few months seemed to me miraculous. She still kept that almost childlike simplicity which from the first I had appreciated in her. Her devotion to Myas was obviously of the most exalted kind. I could understand now what he meant when he told me that it would be absolute ruin if he began to make love to her. Afterwards, he would have been unable to continue his work, or to conduct any experiment in which the least risk to her was involved. I got an impression that she understood this too.

At the end of that fortnight, in the middle of the London season, and with countless engagements on hand, I gave the whole thing up and went away. It was a sudden impulse, which had occurred to me before and will probably occur again. To my friends and acquaintances I suppose that I seem a normal and cheerful bachelor of forty. That perhaps is what I am most of the time. Still, I have been through things. I was quite a young man when the doctors cut me off from the only profession that I could ever have loved. They stopped polo and hunting as well. For a while I was a good deal of an invalid, and that, I dare say, was a sound enough reason for the girl who threw me over and married a better man. My health is fairly good now, and I do most of the right things at the right time. I enjoy the society of my fellow-men, and I think I can hold my own in any of the sports that my health has left open to me. But occasionally I get a sudden revulsion against the kind of life that I am leading. Its pleasures become an unmitigated bore. Its absolute uselessness disgusts me. It is not a cheerful mood, and there is no reason why I should ask my friends to put up with it. Besides, I have found that quiet and solitude are the best cure for it. That is why some years ago I bought for half nothing a little cottage far up on a hill in Gloucestershire, ten miles from the nearest railway-station. When I find that solitude and the simplicity of life there no longer please me, my cure is complete. I can go back and mix with my fellow-men again.

It was partly perhaps because I had seen so much lately of the work which Myas and Miss Lade were doing that this fit of disgust with my own life came on me. I got tired of taking so much care about such unimportant things. I was tired of hearing so much worthless talk, and of contributing my share to the sum of it. I left suddenly, and of course did not let my friends know where I had gone. In these days of motors, if one does that, one is never safe.

I took with me two books, or rather pamphlets, which were all that Daniel Myas had so far published. The first of these was entitled "A Clinical Study of the Physical and Psychical Phenomena of Somatic Dissolution." Myas had often laughed at scientific jargon, but he admitted that he was a master in the use of it himself. This work had appeared originally in the American "Journal of Abnormal Psychology," and had attracted some little attention. The *Lancet* had dealt dutifully but severely with it. Much of it was simply Greek to me. I was never taught any science at school, and I did not know what a good deal of

the jargon meant. But there were passages in it, notably where he summed up his conclusions in more popular language, which were wildly interesting. The other pamphlet had been privately printed since his arrival in England. It was called "Experimental Observations on the Continuity of the Ego." I got on better with this. It was a most amazing little pamphlet. It was Science plus Religion, and Religion plus Poetry. As any reader must have gathered, I am not much of an author myself, but I have read a good deal, and I think I do know good writing when I see it. I read that pamphlet more than once, and it increased my respect for Myas's abilities.

I had been down at the cottage about a week when, at eleven one morning, I received a telegram which had been forwarded to me from St. James's Place. It was signed "Lade," and I did not know whether the mother or the daughter had sent it. It said: "Please come here at once."

I hesitated for a moment. I thought of telegraphing for further particulars. But the telegram seemed so urgent that I thought I ought not to waste time. My car was all ready to start, and there was an express that I could catch. I drove myself (I had no chauffeur in the country), and left the car in the garage near the station. Shortly after four I was in London.

As I had my latchkey with me, I drove to the entrance in Durnford Place. My taxicab could not get quite up to the door, as a dogcart was standing there. It was a seedy-looking dogcart, and apparently had not been washed for a week. A wretched old horse stood dejectedly in the shafts. At the horse's head was a groom in dusty and ill-fitting livery. He was eating nuts, and he stared at me curiously, as if he wondered what I was doing there. Durnford Place was very quiet that afternoon, and the crack of the nutshells rang out loudly. I was just about to pay my cabman, when it occurred to me that after all he might perhaps be useful. I told him to wait. At this moment the garden door opened, and Dr. Vulsame came out. He was drawing a pair of excessively ugly yellow gloves on to his fat hands. He had changed if anything for the worse since the night I met him first. His clothes were shabby, and he looked unwashed and unkempt. His expression was grave and troubled.

He spoke to me at once, without offering to shake hands. "So you've come at last, Mr. Compton?"

"I came as soon as I got the telegram. It was forwarded to me from London. I was away in Gloucestershire."

"I see," he said. "Well, I suppose I had better go in with you."

"Can you tell me what is the matter, Dr. Vulsame?"

"Matter? I thought you knew. They should have told you in the telegram. Daniel Myas is dead."

CHAPTER VIII.

DR. VULSAME BECOMES A NUISANCE.

INSIDE the garden, I paused for a moment. "When did he die?" I asked.

"I was telephoned for at a quarter to eight this morning, and was here by eight. So far as I can tell death must have occurred at least six hours previously."

"And the cause of death?"

"The direct cause was failure of respiration under an anæsthetic. The anæsthetic was chloride of ethyl. I gave notice to the coroner at once, of course. It will be for the inquest to settle whether the death was accidental or not."

I did not much like the man's tone. "Dr. Myas was about the last man in the world to commit suicide," I said.

"I didn't say suicide. There's a sealed letter waiting for you up at the house."

You would probably prefer to open it in the presence of the police, and to show them what it contains."

"Very well," I said. "And Miss Lade?"

"I haven't seen her. In fact, she won't see me. I don't for a moment suppose that she will consent to see you either, Mr. Compton."

"Very natural," I said. "She was devoted to him. This must be a terrible shock to her."

"Do you happen to know the terms of the will?" he asked.

"I do. Why?"

"Mrs. Lade knew them. So presumably did her daughter."

"I don't see what bearing that has on the question."

"Don't you?" sneered Dr. Vulsame. "Perhaps you will at the inquest."

I loathed the man, and was getting more and more angry with him. "Wouldn't it save trouble," I said, "if you were to say quite plainly what you mean? What are you trying to insinuate?"

"Nothing, at present. There is no doubt whatever that Myas made frequent experiments upon himself. He had also experimented with Miss Lade. I found a record of many of the experiments." He jerked his thumb in the direction of the workroom. "He had any amount of that kind of thing in there, and some very neat apparatus for administering it. Clockwork can go wrong, and the medical man may make mistakes. That may have been the reason why, when already under the anæsthetic, he received double the amount of the chloride of ethyl that he intended. I can't say. I have an open mind on the question."

I felt instinctively that this man might do some mischief. I decided to handle him a little more carefully. "I was told by Myas," I said, "that I was to be his sole executor and trustee for Miss Lade. He was also a great friend of mine. You see, I am very deeply interested in this. Could you perhaps spare me an hour or so at St. James's Place, if you're not too busy?"

"Busy?" he said savagely. "Plucky lot of business Myas left me! Well, he's dead. I'll say no more about that just now. Yes, I can come if you like."

"Thank you very much. Perhaps you would like to send your cart away. I've got a taxi there, and I don't suppose that I shall keep you waiting more than a few minutes."

"All right," said Vulsame. "There's the inspector if you want him."

A friendly looking man in plain clothes had just come out of the workroom, locking the door behind him. I introduced myself to him.

"This is a terrible business," I said. "Have you any idea how it happened?"

"So far as I can see," said the inspector, "it was accidental. There was no motive for suicide. I've been looking at the apparatus in there, and it's easy to see how a mistake could be made. It's a clockwork thing, actuating a little pump. You can set it to deliver this anæsthetic stuff once and then stop, or twice and then stop, or any number of times. He was playing a very dangerous game, and he played it once too often. Of course, something may turn up to change my views. There's a sealed letter waiting for you. We haven't been into that yet."

"If you will come on up to the house, we can do that now," I said.

We went up the iron steps, and Mrs. Lade's servant admitted us. She was very frightened, stupid and tearful. She brought us the letter, and the inspector and I opened it together. It contained his will, properly executed, and a short note for myself. The note merely said that Myas was engaged in a line of research which presented certain risks, and that if anything happened to him he wanted to take that opportunity of thanking me for my great kindness to him in the past, and for my promise to look after Alice for the future.

"Had he any near relations?" asked the inspector. "I see he leaves this girl everything."

"No, he had no near relations. He has told me so more than once."

"I see," said the inspector. He made a few notes, including one of my name and address, and then left.

I saw Mrs. Lade for a few minutes. The poor woman was rather incoherent. It was clear that she regarded the presence of any policemen on the premises as a disgrace, and an inquest as a stain on her own personal honour. On these points I did my best to console her. Of Myas she spoke with great enthusiasm. "A better and a kinder man no one could wish to see, if only he could have been kept from messing with chemicals, as I often told him. And now I must look forward to seeing Alice go the same way, she being of age and with a will of her own."

"How is she?"

"Seems like a person dazed. She's alone in her room, and been there best part of the day, and perhaps it's as well. But she did say to me that the work must go on, which to my mind is disregarding the warning that God has given us. We can only hope she'll think better of it."

It was true, as Vulsame had told me, that she knew the terms of the will, and that Alice was now comparatively a wealthy woman. I will do her the justice to say that this did not seem to affect her in the least, except in so far as it removed the terror of funeral expenses. "By which so many have been crippled," she added feelingly.

I left word with her that Miss Lade could see me at any time. She had only to send a telephone message.

I found Vulsame seated in my taxicab, and smoking one of the very worst cigars I have ever had the misfortune to smell. "You've kept me waiting a hell of a time," he said angrily.

"Sorry," I said. I persuaded him not to talk to me in the cab, as the traffic made it difficult for one to hear what was said.

At St. James's Place he watched me as I paid the cabman. "My word!" he said. "Runs up, doesn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it runs up."

"But I suppose," he added tactfully, "you take that out of the estate."

He accepted with alacrity the offer of a whisky-and-soda. I had the whisky left by him for purposes of reference. The more talkative he was, the better he would suit my purpose.

"One thing that you told me, Mr. Vulsame," I said, "surprises me very much. I do not see how Myas can possibly have interfered with your practice. He always spoke of you as an able man. If I may say so, I am sure your genial manners would make you popular in Fulham or anywhere else. I was sorry to hear that business was not very good with you."

"The competition is pretty keen everywhere," he said. "It doesn't take so very much to put a man wrong. What I have told you is quite correct, and my books will show it. If you doubt my word you can see them."

"But, my dear fellow, why on earth should I doubt your word?"

"Very well then. I suppose you know the lines Myas was working on. I did permit him to make certain observations, and carry out certain experiments with patients of mine. It was all quite legitimate, mind you, or I wouldn't have allowed it. Not for a moment. But it got talked about, and, of course, it got exaggerated, and it did me a deal of harm."

"By the way, do give yourself another drink, Mr. Vulsame. And it is solely to this that you assign the falling off in your practice?"

"Solely. I'm as good as ever I was. Better." He took the other drink.

"Well," I said, "this, of course, is a thing which ought to be looked into."

If it's not too delicate a question, did Dr. Myas make you any payment for these important services that you seem to have rendered him? You see, as his executor, I shall have his bankbook in my hands."

"Well, he did. But what we've got to look at is the injury to the capital value of my practice. Do you understand that? If he had left me in his will a matter of two hundred, or, say, three hundred pounds, I should never have said a word about this to anybody. But I understand that I'm not so much as mentioned."

"You are not. And you consider that you have really a moral claim against his estate."

"Moral claim. You've hit the phrase exactly."

"Then, of course, it becomes my duty to consider this. You wouldn't of course expect a decision off-hand."

"Not at all. I'm a reasonable man. Your time is mine." And he took another drink.

"There's one other point," I said. "What is your real opinion about the death of Myas?"

"Between ourselves?"

"Quite."

"The thing's as clear as mud. It was murder. And either the old woman or Miss Lade did it, though almost certainly it was Miss Lade."

"This," I said, "is very interesting."

CHAPTER IX.

I SETTLE DR. VULSAME'S "MORAL CLAIM."

"NOW," he said, "I'm going to tell you. You may have had a high opinion of this Miss Lade, and from something poor Myas once let drop, that was what I gathered. Still, one has got to face the facts."

"Undoubtedly. And the facts?"

"Mrs. Lade, her daughter and her servant all went up to their respective bedrooms at a few minutes past ten last night. They are agreed upon that. They left Myas at work in his laboratory in the garden as usual. He often worked very late. It is said that they did not leave their rooms until the following morning. The servant, who rose at six, discovered that Myas had not been in his bedroom all night, and then called up Mrs. Lade and her daughter. Now, as it happens, I have got a latchkey to the garden entrance in Durnford Place. Myas gave it me at a time when I was seeing him frequently, and often had to fetch him away to cases of mine—sometimes after the rest of the household were in bed. For the last three weeks I have seen much less of him. He told me that he had completed his observations, and that he did not think I could be of any further service to him. When I met him casually in the street, he was rather inclined to snub me. And that's not a thing I take from anybody. Last night, soon after twelve, I was coming back home. I'd been spending the evening with a few friends in a convivial sort of way. I took Durnford Place on my way home. It occurred to me that I might as well go and look up Myas, and have some explanation with him. I wanted to talk to him about the way my practice was going downhill, and I don't mind owning that I wanted another drink, too. As soon as I let myself into the garden, I saw that the laboratory was brightly lit up. Funnily enough, Myas had never shown me his laboratory, though I had dropped a hint or two about it. He was secretive about his work. I don't know to this day what it was that his particular line of research was aiming at. That garden-path, as you may have noticed, is all grown over with

grass and moss. Your footsteps make no sound upon it. I got close up to the window, which was partly open, and was on the point of calling to him, when I heard within the studio two voices. I could not catch what was said; but one was the voice of Myas, and one was the voice of a woman. What would any gentleman do under those circumstances?"

"Go away and hold his tongue."

"That," said Vulsame, with conscious pride, "is exactly what I did. Now that is enough. If Miss Lade says that she went to her bedroom shortly after ten last night, and did not leave it till somewhere about seven this morning, Miss Lade lies."

"You are sure it was her voice?"

"Pretty sure."

"Do you think it enough to be pretty sure?"

"Well, there are other points to be considered besides, you know. What had Miss Lade to gain by the death of Myas? Absolutely everything—he had left her every penny he possessed, and she knew it. What had any other woman to gain by his death? Nothing. We will go on a little further. This morning I am called in and find Myas dead from an anæsthetic automatically administered. Now no medical man in his senses would dream of giving himself an anæsthetic in this way without having somebody present qualified to watch him, and to do anything that might be necessary. Miss Lade had been working as his assistant for some time, and was fully competent. I have definite proof in his own handwriting that on another occasion he had placed himself under an anæsthetic with Miss Lade in attendance. This time, either she deliberately altered the regulator of that mechanical pump, or she saw that things were going wrong and did nothing. Murder in either case."

"Well now, Mr. Vulsame, I'll give you my point of view. I know that Miss Lade did not murder Myas. I know it definitely. I have seen them together frequently, and I cannot be mistaken. Miss Lade's devotion to that dead man was a very real and a very beautiful thing. She would have given her life for him cheerfully. If your evidence before the coroner is on the lines that you have just shown me, that is some of the evidence with which I shall meet it. You see, my friend, that it is of no use for you to say that no medical man would dream of administering an anæsthetic to himself unless there was some competent person with him. It is no use to say it, because that automatic pump proves you wrong. If Miss Lade were present and if she were competent to watch the process of anæsthesia, she was also competent to give the anæsthetic, and there was no necessity whatever for any mechanical apparatus. Myas had made many experiments upon himself with anæsthetics. You have told me there is a record of them. Probably he had found out exactly what he thought he could do within the limits of safety. He may have been exceptional in taking the risk, but the apparatus proves that he took it. You say that Miss Lade lied, and I fully agree with you. It was natural that any woman should lie under those circumstances. If she was with him alone in that laboratory so late at night, after the rest of the household had gone to bed, and this became generally known, her character would suffer for it—though in this respect as in the other I believe her to be entirely innocent."

"Put like that, it does of course look different," said Vulsame.

"Quite so. Now you and I are reasonable men, and can talk this over. You did not find me unreasonable when you spoke, for instance, of your moral claim against Myas's estate. I am somewhat more than the trustee for Miss Lade. I was asked by Myas to look after her. I give you my word of honour that I'm absolutely convinced of her innocence. If you mention before the coroner that Miss Lade was, or may have been, alone in the laboratory with Myas after twelve last night, I have no doubt that she will have an explanation

to give. That explanation would go along with my evidence, which I tell you frankly would be dead against you. But though this preposterous charge of murder will be shown to have nothing in it, in the eyes of the pious and evil-thinking people of Knox Street Miss Lade's reputation will be gone. I do not think it necessary for you to tell the coroner anything whatever about your visit to the laboratory last night. Remember, I was more the friend of Myas than I was of Miss Lade, and I wouldn't say this if I believed there had been the barest possibility of foul play. The reasonable thing and the chivalrous thing for you to do is to say nothing whatever about this incident. And if you are reasonable, you will also find me reasonable."

"In what particular way do you mean?"

He was forcing me to put the matter rather more plainly than I liked. "In every way, I hope. To take one instance, that of your moral claim against the estate of which I am trustee. You know, of course, that a moral claim is not a legal claim. I cannot pay you one penny out of the estate; if I had the best will in the world to do it, the law does not permit me to do it. This does not mean that I do not recognise the force of your moral claim. I am quite sure that Myas never wished you to be a loser by any transactions which you had with him. If I wrote you a cheque on my account for, say, three hundred pounds—I think those were the figures—it would not inconvenience me in any way, and it would indeed give me a great pleasure to do this small thing for my dead friend. Naturally, I should not wish to act less chivalrously than yourself."

"If that is the way you look at it, I'm agreed—perfectly agreed. Why not? The reputation of the girl and the memory of the dead man both gain from the transaction. But if you put it to me that I'm to take three hundred pounds to hold my jaw——"

"My dear fellow, my dear Mr. Vulsame, please make no such preposterous suggestion as that. Do you think I'm not aware that I'm dealing with a gentleman? No, you may be assured that the arrangement between us will never be represented in that light. It is a matter purely between ourselves, and concerns nobody else. You will come to me after the inquest, and we will complete the matter, and not another word will be said about it."

"Very good. I'll take just one last little drink, and then I must be off. But it is a fact that there are a lot of queer things about this case that beat me altogether."

"They beat me, too."

"In one corner of that workroom this morning there was a whole lot of electrical apparatus. What it was I can't say, but it was a big, elaborate thing, and must have cost a pot of money. Well, it was all smashed to bits, just as if it had been broken up with a hammer."

"Yes? Still, it may have been broken accidentally. For that matter, it may have been broken weeks ago. I can't see any bearing that such a thing would have on the death of Myas. By the way, before you go, will you give me your latchkey to Durnford Place? It was, I suppose, Myas's property, and I am responsible."

"Myas gave it me—he didn't lend it me."

"I see. Still, I think you shouldn't keep it. The lock can be changed, of course, but——"

"Oh, I don't want to make a fuss about it! The damn thing's no good to me. Here you are." He laid the key down on the table.

When he had gone, I reflected on my own position. I knew Miss Lade to be innocent. I knew that she had not murdered Myas. I knew that if she was in the laboratory after twelve the night before, it was merely on account of the work that Myas was doing, and she had made the visit secretly for obvious

reasons. This being so, it seemed to me the thing to do was to save her as far as possible. But I was about to pay a man three hundred pounds to suppress evidence at an inquest. And I did not quite like the thought of that when I went round to see my solicitor at his private house that night. I liked it so little that I did not say a word to him about it.

CHAPTER X.

MISS LADE'S STRANGE BEHAVIOUR.

THE coroner's jury returned a verdict of accidental death, and there was little or no suggestion during the inquest that any other verdict was possible. Mr. Vulsame was quite at his best. He had a frock-coat and his professional manner. He was omniscient, but he was also sympathetic. He spoke of Myas as a singularly gifted man who had at one time come to him for advice. Myas, so he told us, was interested in medical psychology, and made many experiments upon himself; he (Vulsame) had given him a warning on this point on a previous occasion. In fact, Vulsame was very impressive and magnificent. Possibly with a view to earning his money, he mentioned that Myas was very happily engaged, and that Miss Lade's devotion to him was a real and very beautiful thing. The echo of my own words made me squirm.

I had not seen Miss Lade before the inquest. She was dressed entirely in black, of course, and kept her veil down. She spoke in a low voice, and seemed perfectly self-possessed. There was even a vague suggestion of dominance and decision about her which I had not noticed before. She was not required to say much. If Vulsame's story of the two voices in the laboratory was a true story—and certainly I believed it—then Miss Lade lied, and she lied simply, firmly and well.

My own evidence was merely to the effect that Myas had no financial trouble, and no other cause so far as I knew for taking his life. I confirmed Vulsame's opinion of the happiness of his engagement, and I mentioned that to my knowledge Myas had been anticipating a considerable success in his line of scientific research.

The coroner had a few wise words to say on the distinction between eccentricity and insanity. The jury might reasonably come to the conclusion that Myas was slightly eccentric, but they could not go further than that. Many medical men, he reminded them, had tried experiments upon themselves. Mr. Vulsame, who had given his evidence admirably, had told them that he himself had found a record of similar experiments in Myas's handwriting, and had given him a very proper and judicious warning against them.

Altogether, it was a great day for Vulsame. I handed him the envelope with my cheque enclosed in it as we left the court.

In accordance with directions contained in his will, the body of Daniel Myas was cremated, and no religious service was held over it. I was the only person present. I think it was Miss Lade who was responsible for the absence of herself and her mother. The mother spoke to me about it, and seemed to regret it. "We mothers have to do what we're told nowadays," she said.

That year for the first time in my life I spent August and September in town. I was busily engaged in getting everything cleared up. Fortunately, it proved to be a very simple matter; Myas had always been in the habit of consulting a solicitor as to his investments, and very few of the investments had to be changed. I saw Miss Lade two or three times for a few moments only at her solicitor's office on matters of business connected with the estate. Her manner to me had changed. She made it quite obvious, I thought, that she meant to

drop me. She asked for no advice. She gave me no hint of her plans. In speaking to me she said as little as possible. Also, I noticed that as far as possible she avoided meeting my eye directly.

Try how I would to prevent it, Vulsame's suspicions of her would come back to my mind. I told myself that these suspicions were unworthy. Miss Lade had seemed somewhat ungrateful to me. She had snubbed me and discarded me for no reason of which I was aware. But neither of those things should have made me suspicious.

Naturally, Myas was a good deal in my mind during these months. I recalled his definite and boastful promise that before the year was out he would demonstrate to me the existence of a human soul, of which mind and body were but the concomitants. Great had been his enthusiasm. Everything had been made to give way to his work. He had looked forward to the day of his experiment. He had told me that it would revolutionise thought—that it would make a new heaven and a new earth. And all the years of work, all the ambition and ability, had ended in a little heap of dust in an oak casket, and things went on as before. One or two obituary notices appeared. That in the *Lancet* was peculiarly admirable. Without taking back one word that had been said about Myas's pamphlet, it still contrived to praise him and to express genuine regret that he had not lived to complete his researches.

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One sunny afternoon, early in October, I had lunched at the Club, and returned to my flat to continue the perusal of an extremely interesting manuscript diary, relative to the Peninsular War, which had been sent by some friends of mine. The idea was that I should edit it for publication, and it was an idea which increasingly appealed to me.

I let myself into the flat with my latchkey, and found on the table in the hall a registered letter in a foolscap envelope. It was addressed to me in a handwriting which, if I had not known him to be dead, I could have sworn to as the handwriting of Daniel Myas.

As I was staring at it, my man came out to take my hat and coat. He said that a person giving the name of Mrs. Lade had called to see me. She had told him that I knew her very well, and had seemed so insistent that he had allowed her to wait.

"That's right," I said. "Show Mrs. Lade into my study."

I put the letter down on the table in my study with the address downwards. And then Mrs. Lade came in.

She was well dressed in deep mourning. I told her that I was sorry I had been out when she called, and that she had had to wait. She said that it had not mattered, and that she had been made quite comfortable.

I asked her if she had lunched. "Oh yes, Sir," she said. "Yes, Mr. Compton, I've lunched." Here, suddenly and without warning, Mrs. Lade burst into tears.

Some little time elapsed before I could get anything like a coherent story out of her. She repeated over and over again that nothing had been the same since the death of Daniel Myas. There were references to a brother in New York, to the fact that she was not a good sailer, and to the kindness of friends in Knox Street under trying circumstances.

Gradually and patiently, I drew it all out. The principal changes had taken place in her daughter. In the matter of money Alice was apparently generous, but she showed her mother very little affection. During the greater part of her time she was shut up in the workroom in which Myas died. She refused to see any of her friends in Knox Street. She spoke little. And, although she caught cold, sitting late in that laboratory, and although it had

affected her voice, she had refused to allow her mother to nurse her at all. "Different altogether, she is," sobbed Mrs. Lade.

At this juncture a letter had arrived from Mrs. Lade's widowed brother in New York. He had children, and needed someone to look after them. He wanted Mrs. Lade and her daughter to come over and live with him. In spite of the fact that she was a bad sailer, the idea had appealed to Mrs. Lade. Since the day of Myas's death, the shop, which had never been very successful, had been shut altogether. Mrs. Lade was a woman who liked to have an occupation. She put the matter before her daughter, and it was her daughter's decision which had so grievously distressed her. Mrs. Lade was certainly to go to live with her brother. All the money that was wanted for her outfit and passage would be forthcoming, and on her arrival in New York she would receive a sufficient income to provide for her in comfort and independence. Alice urged—almost ordered—her to go. But at the same time, Alice refused to accompany her. She said that she was continuing the work which she had begun with Daniel Myas, and that this made it impossible for her to leave England. Tears and persuasions had seemed to have no effect upon her. Would I go and see if I could convince her? "For if I go as she says, it means at my time of life a separation for ever."

I sympathised with the poor old woman, and promised to go and see Alice, whose conduct was becoming more and more inexplicable to me. I think that when old Mrs. Lade left me, she was much comforted.

When she had gone, I picked up that letter from the table, and tore open one end of it. Something fell from it with a metallic little tinkle, and I picked it up. It was the latchkey to the garden entrance in Durnford Place.

CHAPTER XI.

A REMARKABLE LETTER.

THE letter contained in the envelope covered several pages, and was also written entirely in the handwriting of Daniel Myas. It seemed to have been written freely and firmly, and gave no suggestion that it was an imitation of his writing. It bore the same date as the postmark. I will give the letter in full:

"Dear Compton,—It is not a coincidence, a chance similarity; it is I, Daniel Myas, who writes this, though the hand that holds the pen was once the hand of Alice Lade. And I shall redeem my promise to you—to prove by demonstration that the Ego, the soul, the self, exists independently of mind and body, though it is only by mind and body that it becomes cognisable by man under his present conditions.

"I had hoped to redeem that promise in a different way. I assure you I write now with no pride in what I have done, but even with an intense horror of it, and I write chiefly to ask your help.

"Do you understand? I am supposed to be Alice Lade. I am possessed of her mind and her body, but with some modifications that have already taken place and with others, I think, imminent. I am not Alice Lade and I am Daniel Myas. Yes, I know it is incredible, and I know what facile explanation will leap to your mind at once. But that explanation of madness plus a considerable gift for forgery is wrong. I am Daniel Myas, and if you come to see me you will believe that.

"I have to tell you what happened, and I will do so as clearly as I can. But you must make allowances for me. For months I have lived in an agony of fear and remorse, with the fixed intention of suicide never absent from my

mind. It was only yesterday that something occurred to make me give up that intention. I still suffer. Remember, too, that the mind at my disposal is not my mind. There are things which I knew once and know no longer. There are abilities which I once had but no longer possess. Some of these things may come back to me, for some of them have already come back. At this moment, for instance, I can write with equal ease the handwriting of Alice or my own. Other modifications have occurred. Still I write as one not in full possession of my own powers, but limited by the medium through which my Ego becomes cognisable. The Daniel Myas of some months ago could have explained in the smallest detail what his intentions were, and how he proposed to carry them out. I have not these details, and am left with generalities.

"I know that it seemed to me that there was but one way in which the independent existence of the Ego could be demonstrated, and that this was by a transference of an Ego to a mind and body other than that with which it had previously been associated. I put it clumsily. Simply, the aim was that Alice Lade and I should for a while exchange our selves, or souls, as I think you preferred to call them. Many years of experiment and observation had convinced me that this exchange was possible. There were limitations, of course, and some of these I cannot recall. But I know that the exchange could only take place between two persons of opposite sexes. I know that it had to take place when these two persons were anæsthetised. I am beginning to remember vaguely a piece of very complicated and elaborate mechanism and a necessity for most accurate timing. Further than that I cannot go. I have at hand now many pages of notes made in my own writing for my own assistance, and they are as much Greek to me as if I were a first year student. However, since yesterday I have had hopes that my knowledge will come back. You noticed, when we met in Paris, that I spoke French just about as well as I spoke English. I knew the language thoroughly. In my new incarnation I had practically no knowledge at all of French. I could not read a French book, though I knew what a word here and there meant. Yesterday, I found suddenly that it had all come back to me again. More important knowledge than that may also come back.

"On the night of my supposed death, Alice came secretly to the workroom, as she had often done before, and some time was spent in preparation for the experiment. I cannot remember in detail what was done. My recollection only becomes clear at the moment when I recovered from the anæsthetic. I stood up and rubbed my eyes, trying to recall where I was and what I was engaged upon. Then I looked round, and saw huddled in a chair close to me my own dead body. Another glance gave me a reflection in a mirror. Half of the experiment had succeeded, and half had failed. I saw in myself the murderer of Alice Lade. Then followed a short period of panic and madness. I was filled with the idea that I had to remove all evidence of the experiment which had taken place. I broke up the delicate apparatus which I had employed and no longer understood. I burned papers which I think now should have been kept. Remember, I had become a frightened woman.

"I left the body lying there, closed and locked the door, and went back to the house. The body and mind of Alice seemed to work automatically, doing actions which she must often have repeated, actions which were no longer controlled by the higher centres. I found my way in the dark through a part of the house where I had never been before. I stepped aside to avoid obstacles. At one point I was careful to tread very quietly on tiptoe. I found the handle of the door easily, without fumbling for it, knowing just where it would be. It was Alice's bedroom-door.

"I do not want to linger on the horrors of that night. You are not an imaginative man, Compton, but I think you will suppose pretty well what I went

through. I was unable to make any plan of action. From that time onward to the inquest I remained alone as much as possible, and said as little as possible. I looked forward eagerly to the time when I should be able to get Mrs. Lade to go away. I felt a great deal of pity for her. It was not till she had gone that I could take my life. Apart from my agonies of remorse, I suffered from insomnia and from severe and prolonged headaches. Later, when these modifications began to take place in me I was full of fear that Mrs. Lade, or someone else who had known Alice, would see something, and perhaps guess more.

"Yesterday, as I have told you, I recovered one branch of knowledge which I had lost. Who knows that in time the rest may not come back to me? The nature of Alice was plastic and receptive. The force of my own Ego is even now working upon it. I know that my own feelings before the experiment were feelings of triumph. I felt that I, and I alone, had the secret of life and death. As I write that now, with my present defective knowledge, it looks like the raving of a megalomaniac, but it all seemed logical to my mind then, based on science and working out inevitably. Where, I often ask myself, now wanders the soul of Alice Lade? Is there not a faint possibility that it may yet again become cognisable by her own body and mind? To accomplish that it would be worth while to live, and, ultimately, to die. But I cannot stop here. There are many people in this neighbourhood who knew Alice Lade, and will notice the changes that are taking place in her. Much of her special knowledge is slipping from me. Mrs. Lade speaks of things which she expects me to know all about, and I know nothing of them. The strain of fencing with this is becoming too much for me.

"I had intended to cut myself adrift from you altogether. I had intended to let you think that Alice Lade still lived and that I was dead. I was ashamed to let you think the truth. I am ashamed still. But I must have your help. I must have your advice. You, perhaps, will know of some place where I can go. It will be necessary, too, to give you a power of attorney to deal with all financial business. You understand what I am asking? I am asking you to help me to bring Alice back again.

"It cannot all be arranged by letter. You must come and see me, painful and shocking though this will be to you. I enclose the key of the garden entrance in Durnford Place, the key which you returned. Come to-night after ten, when there will be no fear of interruption."

There was no signature to the letter. By the time that I had finished reading it, it was beginning to grow dark. I switched on all the lights in the room. At the same time I rang for my man, not because the order which I gave him was of any importance, but because I wished to speak to some ordinary normal person. I felt sick with horror. I could not bear to remain alone in my rooms, and went back to my club again. I was quite determined not to go to Durnford Place that night. I meant to send a telegram, for I was afraid of what I might hear on the telephone.

But I had to go.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROMISED DEMONSTRATION.

I HAVE occasionally seen, when for my sins I have been taken to a music-hall, a performance which was, I believe, intended to be amusing and funny—the impersonation of a woman by a man. It is a thing which always disgusts me. The more cleverly it is done the more loathsome it is. If I happen to see that item on ahead in the programme, I take care to be

out of sight and sound of it. I do not know if this is a special peculiarity or weakness of my own, but I mention it to give some idea of my extreme reluctance to answer the appeal which had been made to me. However, as I have said, I had to go. I had been the friend of Myas, and I had been the friend of Alice Lade. Whatever was waiting for me behind the door of the laboratory, had a claim upon me; and if to save myself I neglected that claim, I should only suffer the more for it in the end by losing my self-respect. I, plain, conventional, and unimaginative man, as Myas had described me, had by sheer force of circumstances been drawn into a very whirlpool of horror and morbidity. I had to go through the mud.

Once I had made my mind up to it, I think I went through the thing pretty steadily. There was an electric light in my taxicab, and on my way to Durnford Place, I read the evening paper assiduously. The lock of the garden-door went very stiffly, as it had not been used lately, and had rusted. The blinds were drawn down over the windows of the workroom, and only a faint glimmer of light showed behind them. I knocked at the door—my usual brisk, social knock.

I had expected it, of course, and I think it should have had less effect upon me than it did. The voice which bade me enter was deep and resonant. It was the voice of Daniel Myas. I am afraid that I hesitated for a second or two before I could bring myself to turn the handle of the door.

The workroom was, perhaps, thirty-six feet in length. Near the door by which I had entered there was one electric light, heavily shaded. The further end of the workroom seemed at first to be in complete darkness. Then, as my eyes got accustomed, I could distinguish something moving. It came a very little nearer to me, and now I could distinguish a man's dressing-gown, with the sleeves turned back, because the arms within were too short for it. The collar of the dressing-gown was turned up, and there was a veil over the face.

Again the voice of Myas came out of the darkness:

"I know exactly what you're feeling, Compton. You needn't shake hands. I understand."

"Nonsense," I said; and, advancing, took in my own the small hand of Alice Lade. Through the veil I could distinguish dimly the face of Alice Lade, but through her eyes the eyes of Daniel Myas looked out. That was, perhaps, the supreme touch of terror—the eyes of the man looking from the woman's face.

I remained for over an hour, talking with this ghastly hermaphrodite. I sat by the lamp. He—for I felt that it was he—sat some distance from me in the dusk. Obviously, while we were talking, he suffered from extreme physical pain. At one time he broke off, and took up a hypodermic syringe. I saw the sleeve of the dressing-gown pulled back, and the small white arm. Part of the time he spoke in French, and I think he did this with intention. To me it was certainly convincing. Alice Lade may have known a few words of French, but certainly she could not have spoken it like that. Very few men in England could have spoken it quite like that.

All idea of any scientific triumph seemed to have vanished. His one aim was to bring Alice Lade back again. It was to that end, and to his own self-obliteration that he now meant to devote himself. He believed, though the belief seemed to me instinctive rather than reasonable, that if he could recover the knowledge he possessed before the experiment, this would become possible. It was firstly essential that he should get away to some place where he was not known, and that he should be separated from Mrs. Lade. The organs of the voice are peculiarly susceptible of variation, and there his own personality had already effected a great change. To Mrs. Lade he only dared to speak in whispers,

pleading a loss of voice from a cold. The pigmentation of the hair and of the iris of the eye was also beginning to change. He might be asked for explanations which he could not and dared not give.

I agreed with him. I said that I had already seen Mrs. Lade myself, and that I would see her again. Already I prepared in my mind the story that I should tell her to account for my change of view; obviously the least cruel thing which one could do for her was to send her to her brother in New York.

I told Myas-Lade of my little cottage, standing all by itself on a hill in Gloucestershire. I was ready to put the cottage and my two servants there at his disposal. He accepted this with great gratitude. When I warned him that the place was desperately lonely, for the first time he laughed—a short, grim laugh. He wanted nothing better than to be quite alone.

But he would not go there as Alice Lade. He would not go there as a woman at all. Already, so he said, he felt it would be more easy to pass as a man than as a woman. But he needed, of course, a complete outfit of man's clothes, and he had already taken all the measurements so that I might get these for him. The power of attorney had also been prepared beforehand. And every-one of these prosaic and businesslike touches seemed to add to the ghastliness of the whole thing. When I left, I shook hands again and said good-bye. I was not to see him again. The rest of our arrangements could easily be made by letter or on the telephone.

I had just left when I heard rapid and unsteady footsteps coming along the pavement behind me. I turned sharply round and found myself face to face with Vulsame. He was wearing new clothes, and he was a good deal excited by drink.

"What do you want?" I asked him bluntly.

He said it was all right. Mum was the word. He knew now why I had been so desperately anxious that he should give up his key to the garden-door. It was a bit indecent, considering that the man had only been dead a few months, but if the girl——

I had had quite enough to try me for one evening. I hit Vulsame pretty hard in the face. I waited for a few moments to see if he wished to attempt the usual form of retaliation. But as he did not, and babbled solicitors, I told him to go to the devil and left him. Apparently, sobriety brought wisdom, for I heard no more from him.

My interview with Mrs. Lade next day was rather painful, but I succeeded in persuading her to go at once. I told her that grief at her loss had affected her daughter's mind, and I quoted a non-existent doctor on the subject. It was necessary that Alice should be alone, preferably at some place in the country. Undoubtedly, when she had made a complete recovery, and was her old self again, she would wish to follow her mother to New York. One has to tell these kindly lies, I suppose. Once the authority of a doctor was quoted, it was easy to do anything with Mrs. Lade. In a few days she was out of England.

Myas-Lade left for Gloucestershire early one morning, and I said good-bye to him over the telephone. He promised to write as soon as he arrived at my cottage. At four that afternoon I bought from a newsboy a copy of the paper which gave an account of a disaster to an express. There was a list of the killed, and the name of "M. Daniel" was among them. The newspaper made the most of the fact that although this "M. Daniel" had been travelling as a man, it was now found that she was a woman. The body was never identified or claimed.

It was a year later that I wrote to Mrs. Lade to break to her the news of her daughter's death. I had sent her supposed reports of Alice's health from time to time, and I had been careful to lead up to this. She wrote me rather a pathetic reply, thanking me for all I had done.

There, for the present, I have to leave it. I have seen and experienced things which I cannot understand. I do not intend, though, to let them haunt me, but to put them out of my mind.

POSTSCRIPT.

THIS year I told my old friend Dr. Habaden, who was attending me professionally, the story of Daniel Myas and Alice Lade, very much as I have set it down here. He did not seem greatly surprised. His attitude was rather one of irritation.

"Really, Compton," he said, "it seems to me that you have been taking too much upon yourself. You are a layman, and can't be supposed to understand these things. Why on earth, when some appearance of the personality of Myas began to show itself in this Lade girl, did you not consult me?"

"Because it seemed to me a thing entirely outside your beat. What is your view of the case?"

"The only possible view. Myas was a clever man, as I have always told you, and I have no doubt that he was sincere. He probably did believe that by some fantastic method of his own this exchange of personalities could be accomplished. But his ideas were quite wild and undisciplined, and he was trying to do a thing that is not possible, and never has been, and never will be. Undoubtedly Myas died from the effects of the chloride of ethyl. It's dangerous stuff. We use it as a spray to produce local anæsthesia mostly. His soul, if he had a soul, may have gone through various adventures of which I can know nothing, but the one thing quite certain is that it did not enter into possession of the mind and body of Alice Lade. There are very many similar cases of double personality on record, though I admit that the case of Alice Lade presents its peculiar and interesting features. You know as well as I do that every anæsthetic produces a temporary disorder of the mind. This disorder may, and sometimes does, become permanent and persistent. It was not the first time that Myas had given an anæsthetic to that poor girl. The person you saw in the laboratory that night was Alice Lade and nobody else, but it was Alice Lade with a fixed delusion that she was Daniel Myas, and with some very curious but quite unconvincing physical evidence to show for her belief."

"Tell me about these cases of double consciousness."

"A girl who is morose and well educated wakes up one morning as a totally different person. She is now very cheerful, but absolutely ignorant of the things she knew previously. Sometimes the two states alternate. Sometimes in one state the subject has no memory whatever of what has happened in the other. The thing is explained to my mind by the theory of complete somnambulism. Alice Lade was a case for medical treatment. In fostering her delusion, and in allowing her to dress as a man and to go off by herself, you did very wrong."

"Habaden," I said, "the fact that there have been similar cases and that they have been classified, does not impress me very much. Classification is not explanation. The theory of absolute somnambulism does not remove the difficulty, but only gives another name to it. Suppose you explain this point to me. Alice Lade knew little or no French. After the death of Myas she spoke French fluently and perfectly."

"Unconscious memory, my dear fellow. There seems to be practically no limit to what it can do. I could give you twenty cases of it, which to you would seem almost miraculous. Alice Lade had heard you and Myas talking French together. She had unconsciously remembered the sounds."

"She must also have unconsciously understood the meaning and the grammar.

For the French she spoke to me that night in the studio was not a repetition of sounds which she might have heard before. She was expressing her meaning correctly. However, I need not labour that point. Do you suppose that Myas and I would ever have spoken French in the presence of that girl, knowing that she did not understand it? Of course we never did anything so barbarous."

"You or somebody else must have done so, because that is the only possible explanation."

"And that," I said, "is about the least logical, the least scientific observation I ever heard from you."

"It is not only from the medical point of view that you have been wrong, Compton. What right had you got to bribe Vulsame to suppress evidence at the inquest? Why did you lose your temper with him and assault him? What business had you got to allow the body of Alice Lade to go unclaimed and to be buried like the body of a pauper? And what about her money? I suppose you have found some equally high-handed way of dealing with that."

"That's all right. She left no will, and as sole trustee for her and with a full power of attorney from her, I exercised my discretion. Everything was realised, and the money sent out to Mrs. Lade in New York. I have her receipts and the trust accounts if you care to look at them."

"Don't be an ass. You know perfectly well what I am accusing you of—of taking too much into your own hands, and overriding the law of the land. How did you manage about the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Have you sent conscience-money?"

"I have not, and I intend to send none. If, as I believe, the person who died in that railway accident was Daniel Myas, the duties are already paid."

"But it was not. It was Alice Lade and nobody else."

"There, again, I have to differ from you. I do not believe that Alice Lade is dead. She is separated from her mind and body, but not in the way that the soul is separated from the mind and body by dissolution. It is hopeless to talk about it. If I gave you experiences which I have had myself during the last year or two, you would merely think that I was insane. But I am convinced that Alice Lade still belongs to this earth. As for your other points, I certainly did think that my actions were doubtful. But in every case I did what I thought would be to the best interests of my two friends."

"That I can quite believe. Now tell me—what are these experiences that lead you to believe that Alice Lade still belongs to this earth?"

I did not tell him. Nor have I any intention of setting them down here. They constitute a purely personal matter.

Dr. Habaden was attending me for a revival and extension of the old trouble which many years ago shut me out from my profession and from one or two other things. He and the other doctors take a serious view of the case. As I am not a very timid or hysterical person, I have persuaded them to speak quite plainly to me, and they give me about six months more to live.

It is our habit to regard death as the great revealer of secrets. We believe that after death we shall understand everything. I am not, perhaps, qualified to estimate the evidence. It has sometimes seemed to me that after death there is nothing, and sometimes that we shall only exchange one tangle for another, be wearied with fresh problems, and forget those which we have perforce left unsolved.

And yet in a way I do look forward to death. I have the conviction, though I can give no reason for it, that the story of Daniel Myas and Alice Lade is not yet finished, and that elsewhere I shall form part of it.

THE END.



THE MAN WHO LIVED AGAIN

*Being No. 1 of the strange cases of
Dr. Xavier Wycherley, Mental Healer*

by
MAX RITTENBERG

*Illustrated by
Emile Verpilleux*

"WHY not?" quietly remarked the man at the other side of the table. His voice was smooth, even, cultured, and with a peculiarly soothing quality in it. Voices tell character as nothing else does.

"Of course it's impossible," answered Sir Miles Chenieston dreamily. Then he pulled himself together with a start, for the man at the opposite side of the restaurant table was a complete stranger to him. They had not exchanged a word previously. The stranger's remark had fitted in so completely with his "brown study" that his answer had been given quite involuntarily.

Sir Miles looked at him coldly and murmured the conventional. "I'm afraid I have not the pleasure——"

"Nor I," said the stranger. "But it would be a pity to let stupid convention prevent us from being of service to one another. My name is Wycherley, Dr. Xavier

Wycherley"—he passed over a card. "You were saying that you wished you could only have your life to live over again."

"I said nothing, to the best of my belief. Certainly my thoughts were running in that direction."

"Very much the same thing."

(Chenieston stared at him.)

"Now you are wondering whether I am a madman, or merely some kind of trickster new to you. Outwardly, I appear to be respectable, and yet—now it is on the tip of your tongue to tell me that I am damned intrusive." He spoke quite quietly, with an undercurrent of gentle irony. Curiously enough, while his eyes were keenly fixed on the baronet, his left hand was engaged in drawing again and again on a wine-list minute portraits of him, marvellously delicate and accurate. Dr. Wycherley had the faculty of being able to do two things perfectly at the same time.



"I can give you what you desire."

The baronet looked back at him with suspicion in his eyes.

"It's not possible . . . I don't know you——"

"It *is* possible. I can give you your life to live over again."

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Chenieston's sense of humour came to his rescue, and he smiled broadly. "I admit it. I feel that convention would expect me to apologise, but I'm not going to do so. It is a damned intrusion, and you know it. Still, let's pass that. You interest me. My name's Chenieston." He took a card from his waistcoat-pocket.

Dr. Wycherley glanced at the proffered card.

"There are not many things that interest you nowadays, Sir Miles. The gaming-table"—he waved his hand in the direction of the neighbouring room, packed with fevered humanity crowding over the green field of the goddess Chance—"the gaming-table has no attraction for you, your liqueur has lost its savour, your excellent cigar has gone out from want of attention."

Chenieston looked at it, and then threw it over the balcony into the palm-gardens below them. "Go on," he said.

"And, as you were saying, you wished you had your life to live over again. The world bores you. There are no surprises left. You have tasted everything. There is nothing left to do. It is satiety. No," added quickly, "I have not been making inquiries about you beforehand—that passing impression of yours is a mistake, though a pardonable one. Believe me when I say that I have never seen you before this hour, nor did I know your name before you gave me your card."

"I believe you," answered Chenieston. The stranger's voice carried sincerity. "But I must really keep better control of my features. I *had* flattered myself that my thoughts didn't show on the surface."

"My training has lain in the direction of sensing what is below the surface."

"You are a London specialist, I take it?"

"I am a specialist," answered Dr. Wycherley, putting a shade of emphasis on the word, "but my name will not be found on the British Register, and my field is the world. I am here studying."

"Studying?"

"Men and women. Here at Monte Carlo they unmask . . . But, as I was saying a few minutes ago, why not live your life over again?"

"Mephistopheles is not roaming Monte Carlo," answered Chenieston; "and in any case I don't know that I would care to play Faust. The rôle had its drawbacks."

"The drawbacks were due to Mephistopheles' ideas of a *quid pro quo*, were they not?"

"I have been frank with you," said Chenieston brusquely, "and I would like you to be equally frank with me. In plain words, what are you driving at?"

Dr. Wycherley looked out over the black, velvety Mediterranean before answering, sipping his coffee slowly. Then he turned on Chenieston a pair of dark, penetrating eyes, and answered with quiet emphasis, making the simple phrase carry a world of meaning: "I can give you what you desire."

The baronet looked back at him with suspicion in his eyes.

"It's not possible . . . I don't know you—"

"It is possible," was the stranger's deliberate answer. "Quite possible. I can give you your life to live over again . . . if you will . . . but I am not forcing my gifts upon you. One day, perhaps, you may care to come to me. You have my address on the card. I will now bid you good-evening."

He rose and bowed courteously in a half-foreign way. Sir Miles returned his "Good-evening" in non-committal fashion. He followed the doctor with his eyes as he threaded his way through the crowded gaming-room.

What did it mean, thought Chenieston? Of course there was some trickery underlying it. He felt hurriedly for his pocket-book. It was there intact, and he mentally apologised. The man was a gentleman beyond doubt. Suppose it were really possible to . . . No; the idea was impossibly fantastic—ridiculous!

But the idea was not to be dismissed so lightly. When Dr. Wycherley planted his mental seeds, it was with the skill and experience of a master gardener. All through the winter and ensuing spring the idea started up unbidden into Chenieston's consciousness when he was apparently thinking of other matters. During the summer he fought against the growing obsession—tore up Dr. Wycherley's card, made himself busy with outdoor sports, even tried to interest himself in photography.

His attempt was a failure. The strange

doctor had placed a mental finger "on the spot," and his finger pressed upon it ceaselessly. Sir Miles was indeed bored by the world; satiated at forty-five. He had title, money, wide estates, health—to outward appearance a man to be envied. But he had no wife or child, brother or sister, and with his distant relatives he was out of sympathy. His short married life of many years ago had been a disastrous episode; for his young wife had quickly plunged into the frivolities of a "smart set," against his wishes, until they had drifted further and further apart and love had turned to hatred.

Cheniaston divorced her, for cause, settled a lump sum on her, and put her out of his life. Since then no other woman had made a niche in his heart. His happiness he would entrust to no other's keeping.

But happiness kept to oneself turns sour—like bread hoarded away. He had sought happiness in selfish pleasures, and found only satiety. He had made a wilderness and called it happiness.

At the end of the summer he was shooting—wearily, mechanically, without pleasure—on his Scottish grouse-moor. His house-party included a married couple, the Trevors, whose evident happiness in one another made him bitter. In the gunroom one evening Trevor became confidential concerning his wife. Said he:

"The little woman had a bad time of it a year ago; thought I was going to lose her; nothing organic, you know—mental worry. The loss of our child. Doctors could do nothing. Then we came across an extraordinary fellow—I believe he's got Italian blood in him; anyhow, he made my wife a new woman. Lives in a queer little island on an Italian lake—Isola Salvatore it's called——"

"Name Wycherley?" asked Cheniaston. That had been the solitary address on the doctor's card—Isola Salvatore, and nothing further.

"Yes. . . . By the way, we never mention the child. It belongs to the past. My wife has forgotten."

"Forgotten!" It sounded incredible.

"Completely."

October on Lake Rovellasco is the picked month of the year. Even Cheniaston, satiated with the glories of the world,

felt stirred by the quiet beauty of the scene as he looked out from the window of his hotel by the lakeside. Rovellasco is not yet a tourist centre. Presently, perhaps, we shall see blatantly advertised: "A Week in Rosy Rovellasco for Five Guineas!" and then good-bye to the quiet scene that Sir Miles gazed on.

At the far end, where the mountains crowd down upon the lake and take it to their arms, was a solitary islet deeply wooded. From amongst the trees peeped out a white glimpse of a villa. Cheniaston's eyes came back to that white spot again and again. Finally he seemed to arrive at a decision, for he entered his room and started to pack his portmanteau. He was travelling without his man.

He had the bag carried down to the lakeside, and hailed a boatman in halting Italian:

"I want you to row me to Isola Salvatore."

The boatman shrank a little and crossed himself hurriedly.

"I do not like to," he answered. "No one likes to. He sends a boat ashore himself for his visitors. Perhaps if the signore will wait——"

Cheniaston unwrapped a couple of five-lire notes from a roll and showed them silently.

The boatman hesitated; his feelings were plainly torn between fear and greed.

Cheniaston took out some further loose change from his trouser-pocket.

"If I do, signore, you will not ask me to set foot on the island?"

"Very well," answered Cheniaston curtly, and seated himself in the boat. He felt a natural disgust at the boatman's fear, but at the same time a feeling of something uncanny came down upon his own mind like a mist slowly driving over the hills. This man Wycherley must have queer powers. After a while the baronet endeavoured to draw the boatman into conversation, but whenever the questions came round to the subject of Isola Salvatore and its owner, the man evaded them or affected to misunderstand.

As they drew near the islet the boatman suddenly crossed himself and muttered an invocation for heavenly protection.

"What is it?" asked Cheniaston sharply. He strongly objected to all this mystery.

"Look, signore! See for yourself!"



The man pointed tremblingly to a small, dark object tearing through the water around the island.

"It is a dog—that is all," answered Chenieston. "Why all this fuss about a dog? Certainly it is swimming faster than any dog I have ever seen in the water."

"He is not human, signore! Look, as he approaches, at his eyes!"

The dog tore towards them, but as

"Look, signore! See for yourself!" The man pointed tremblingly to a small, dark object. (Page 711.)

though unconscious of their presence. The boatman hurriedly rowed out of its way. As it passed, Chenieston noted with something of a shock that only the whites of its eyes were to be seen, although the eyelids were full open.

"You see, signore—he is a hound of hell!"

"Get on!" said Chenieston brusquely.

As they approached a small landing-stage on the islet a servant came to meet them. He was clearly foreign, but spoke English quite adequately:

"My master bids you welcome, Sir Miles. He expects you, but is unfortunately

called away at the moment. He asks you to excuse him until this evening."

Chenieston exhibited no surprise at his name being known to the servant. It would be easily accounted for by some means of communication between the hotel and Isola Salvatore, he thought. He followed the man to the room assigned to him, a room furnished with great simplicity, but equal taste. Its characteristic, as well as the characteristic of the whole house, was restfulness—the atmosphere breathed peace.

Until dinner Chenieston wandered about the garden of the house—a garden of botanical wonders. The ends of the earth seemed to have been ransacked for strange trees and plants with which to clothe the isle—camphor-trees, pepper-trees, palm-trees, trees of strange spices; cedars of Lebanon and deodars from the Himalayas and cryptomerias from the Far East; pines from the Rockies and eucalypti from New Zealand; wonderful vines and creepers everywhere. It was a veritable isle of spices; it breathed of peace and forgetfulness. Chenieston felt strangely soothed in spirit.

After dinner, simple but in perfect gastronomic taste, the baronet took his cigar to a seat under a giant magnolia, looking out over the dark lake and the snow-peaks to the north. He fell into a reverie from which he was roused by suddenly finding Dr. Wycherley smoking beside him in silence.

"Excuse my not coming to welcome you before," said the doctor. "I had to go off to Japan last night—a patient of mine."

"I hope you had a pleasant trip," answered Chenieston conventionally. Then he became aware of the extraordinary statement made by the doctor, and added hurriedly: "I thought, for the moment, you said Japan."

"Yes; that is what I said—of course, I did not mean in body."

"You seem to have made a curious reputation for yourself in these parts," said Chenieston brusquely.

The doctor smiled, and answered with gentle irony:

"I treated some of the peasants round here—'cast out devils,' and so forth. They were very undecided whether to class me as an archangel or a lieutenant of Lucifer's; finally they settled on the latter."

"Your dog—"

"Ah, yes, you met Rolf taking his four o'clock constitutional. I should explain that he has a perfect horror of the water in the ordinary way. When he was a puppy somebody tried to drown him, and I came to his rescue—nothing will induce him to go into the water now."

"He looked as if he were swimming in his sleep—it was very queer."

"Precisely. Post-hypnotic suggestion—ordered somnambulism, if you prefer it. It is good for his health to take a daily swim. . . . It suggests undeveloped possibilities in everyday life, does it not—draught horses, mules, elephants and so on? You take my meaning?"

With his left hand Dr. Wycherley was making delicate experiments with the almost human leaves of a "sensitive mimosa," though all the time his eyes were fixed on his guest.

Chenieston drew himself together sharply and began:

"That was not quite what I came to see you about."

"There is no need for you to go into a detailed explanation. I sensed that when you arrived at the lakeside yesterday. You want to hear more—to continue our Monte Carlo conversation. Especially you want to know just precisely what I can offer you, and, to put it bluntly, what my terms are."

"There seems no need for me to hold up my side of the conversation."

Dr. Wycherley smiled again.

"Not just at present. This is of course elementary and quite preliminary. Later on, should you wish to try the experiment, I shall ask you to talk for days at a time. . . . To begin with, what are my terms for giving you your life over again? Not money, for of that I have ample for my simple needs. Not influence or power, for that I can build for myself. No; my demands are less material." He paused.

"Well, what can I give you?"

"Data."

"I don't follow you."

"Scientific data—material for my life-work, psychological research. I should ask you to report progress. To bring, say twice a year, the book of your life for my inspection. *I want to know what a man would do with his second life.*"

"There are devilish possibilities in that," answered Chenieston, setting his teeth.

"Precisely. If I don't inspire you with confidence, you would be an utterly weak fool to trust yourself in my hands for an instant. If I were a poor man, the temptation might be irresistible; if I were a criminal man, the consequences might be horrible; if I were an enemy of society, the consequences might be appalling. It is for you, a man of the world, to make up your mind what sort of a man I am. On the one hand you have the evidence of the peasants around here; on the other hand——"

"I met the Trevors," interrupted Chenieston.

"That was a very simple case—like the amputation of a finger to a surgeon. Your case, I would warn you frankly, would be more in the nature of a major internal operation. Have you the courage?"

"Explain to me what you would do."

Dr. Wycherley threw away his cigarette.

"Let us get at fundamentals—let me show you the psychological basis of happiness. Happiness is just contentment—neither riches nor power can of themselves give a man happiness. Happiness comes from within. The world laughs at the millionaire who says that he wishes he were poor and obscure, but *he* speaks from bitter experience. He has bought dearly the knowledge I now place before you. Happiness is just contentment, and contentment is illusion. Contentment sees the good and ignores the evil. Contentment forgets. Contentment makes every day a new age, a wonderful experience opening out vistas of a rose-strewn future. *You* live in the past; every new experience as it arises is stale to you because you mentally compare it with the past. You have seen everything, tasted everything, done everything. Your experience is a daily curse to you.

"Now suppose you could *forget* all that had happened to you from twenty-one to—shall we say forty-five? The world would be a new place to you; your life would be before and not behind you. You would be a young man in mind again."

"But not in body," interrupted Chenieston.

"No; one cannot altogether put back the development of the body. But 'a man is as young as he feels' is an old saying, and a very true one. I know boys

of fifty—I expect you know some also. The mind reacts on the body."

"To have a blank page from twenty-one to forty-five would hold its disadvantages," said Sir Miles thoughtfully.

"Precisely. Therein lies the difficulty of the operation. One has to cut out only what is deleterious. It is like removing a great cancerous growth from the body. One must use the scalpel very warily. It is not an operation for the raw medical student. You place your mental life in the hands of the trained surgeon . . . if you have faith in him. That is why I said a little while ago that I should ask you to talk for days at a time. Your past life would have to be laid bare to me, and to my judgment you would have to confide the decision of what should be cut out and what left in place. There is the matter in a nutshell."

"You propose to hack at my mind, my Ego, my individuality?"

"There you betray an ignorance of psychology. You confuse several distinct issues. I cannot touch your Ego or higher self—we call it the 'consciousness.' I can only operate on your lower self, the 'sub-consciousness,' the warden of your memories. In the hypnotic state we converse and treat only with the patient's sub-consciousness."

"Then where does the higher self go to?"

"Where does it go to in sleep, I ask you in return? But let me lend you a scientific book to-night which will put the matter before you in detail."

"Thanks," said Chenieston. "I will read it. To-morrow I will give you my decision."

In after days the month that Chenieston spent on Isola Salvatore seemed to him like a hazy dreamland. He remembered vaguely that Dr. Wycherley had placed him at evenfall of the second day under the great magnolia, stretched out in a gloriously easy chair, and had suspended in front of and above him an imprisoned firefly. On this he had to concentrate his gaze until tired eyelids closed down over tired eyes. Meanwhile the doctor was talking to him—quietly, smoothly, soothingly. Sleep had stolen upon him—smooth, restful, heavenly sleep.

He had no direct knowledge of what had happened to him in sleep, but Dr. Wycherley had told him that he was then talking

en rapport with his sub-consciousness for hours at a time, bringing out his past life, ordering forgetfulness of this, allowing remembrance of that.

The month was to Chenieston at once an eternity and a moment.

In the intervals between the hypnotic trances he had written and signed long documents for the instruction of his lawyers, his bankers and his stewards, directing the disposal of his estates amongst his distant relatives and various charities should he not return again to his world. He was to give out that he had gone to a vague somewhere to shoot big game—a handy excuse—and he was to start life afresh under a new name and with a few thousands only as capital. He was to be one of the world's workers.

He began to grow a beard to change his outward identity, and Dr. Wycherley spent long hours training up within him a new voice while in the hypnotic state. Change the voice, and you make a man unrecognisable to his friends.

When Stephen Carruthers—this was the name agreed upon—left Isola Salvatore he staggered mentally as a man staggers bodily when he leaves the nursing-home. His past life was mainly a blank to him, though certain memories remained which Dr. Wycherley had judged advisable. There were sudden gaps in his memory stitched together and working unsmoothly, as the muscles work unsmoothly where the surgeon has used the knife. Queer flashes of unconnected incidents came upon him every now and then, dazzling him. He felt horribly helpless.

The doctor accompanied him to land and stayed with him for months while they roamed the Continent together. Gradually Carruthers began to feel his feet—to speak metaphorically—and a great happiness surged upon him. Everything was new, fresh, unexplored. The Riviera had before seemed to him a pleasure-city, painted like the cheeks and lips of a painted woman—a horrible, rouged outrage upon Nature; now he saw the good and not the evil, and it was fresh to him and very pleasant to his eyes. The blood within him danced and sparkled like champagne. He thought and spoke as a youngster fresh from college.

Carruthers was a new man.

At the age of forty-five—to outward

appearance—a man cannot very well study for and enter one of the close professions. The few oldish men who do walk the hospitals or eat dinners at the Temple are regarded by the world with good-natured, rather contemptuous pity. Carruthers, finding himself in possession of a few thousand pounds only, insufficient to live on idly but offering possibilities for earning an income, chose to enter business, which has no age-barrier.

He returned to London. As far as his memory went, he had not seen it since he was a boy of twenty-one or so, and to his eyes great changes had taken place. They struck him sharply like a blow in the face delivered in the dark—at first he was confused and deafened. It took time for him to adjust himself.

Queer flashes of sub-conscious memory stirred him to actions which were meaningless to his understanding. One day, for instance, he found himself walking mechanically up the steps of a mansion in Berkeley Square and ringing the bell. A butler appeared and asked him his business. Suddenly—to his painful confusion—Carruthers discovered that he had no business there, had no reason to be walking up those steps and ringing that bell. He pulled himself together and, for the sake of saying something, asked if the master of the house were in. The butler, looking at him suspiciously as someone of dubious intentions, replied that Sir Miles Chenieston was abroad, and edged him down the steps again. The name seemed somehow familiar to Carruthers, but he could not place the connection. It was one of many worrying episodes.

With part of his money he bought a share in a small publishing firm, and in the interest of the work the scars in his memory were smoothed out of conscious thought. The semi-professional aspect of the publishing business appealed to his natural instincts, and since his partner—Bailey by name—was easy to get on with, the work gave him keen pleasure. "Office hours" meant nothing to him; often he would stay on at Booksellers' Row long after the clerks had left and the neighbouring offices were cold and dark, and the grey ghosts of little old caretakers came out of their daylight hiding-places to dust and sweep. He was keen to build up the business into a large organisation.

"How young you are!" said Bailey to him one day, half chaffingly, half enviously. "I declare you make me feel like an old fogey."

"I am young," answered Carruthers. "Why shouldn't I be? Everything is so new and fresh—life rushes into one full tide. Isn't it the same with you?"

"I wish I knew your secret."

"What secret?" Carruthers felt, for a brief fraction of a second, a queer mental confusion that was like a sudden stab of pain. "I haven't got secrets, my dear fellow."

"I only meant the secret of your perpetual youth," his partner hastened to explain. The subject dropped.

Twice a year, spring and autumn, Carruthers took a holiday from work and journeyed to the islet on Lake Rovellasco in unconscious fulfilment of his contract with Dr. Wycherley. Some force within him impelled him to steep himself in the waters of peace, to feel the garden of spices close around him and take him to itself in an ecstasy of joy unutterable. He yielded himself to the soothing passes of the mental healer—all unconscious he laid his bare soul to the gaze of Dr. Wycherley, who studied him as the biologist studies the growth of some strange new organism.

In his waking intervals Carruthers fished, bathed, rowed about the lake. He made great friends with Rolf, who, barring only the bathe, was ready to accompany him anywhere. Rolf was a big shaggy-haired English sheep-dog, born for friendship.

It was on one of these lake excursions that Helen Mannering came into Carruthers's life. The occasion was pure chance—one of those sudden squalls that occasionally sweep down in fury on Lake Rovellasco from the snow-peaks and toss the waters as a farmer pitchforks the hay. She was alone in a light skiff with a local boatman, who unexpectedly lost an oar, lost nerve, and implored help from above.

Carruthers, not far off, saw the danger and rowed hard to help, Rolf barking eagerly on the front seat. Nothing could have been worse for the boatman's peace of mind. Abandoning the other oar, he grovelled on the floor of the boat, while the waves slapped in angrily.

"Can you catch a rope?" shouted Carruthers.

Mrs. Mannering pluckily climbed over the prostrate boatman to the front of the skiff, caught the rope not unskillfully, and tied it to a ring. With the skiff in tow, Carruthers faced the wind and kept head to waves for an hour or more until the squall died away and the sun came out to smooth down the waters.

It was natural for Carruthers to call at her hotel next day to make polite inquiries. But it was more than mere politeness that took him—he had felt strangely attracted towards this woman no longer young, no longer beautiful, and occupying the position of a paid nurse to a testy old gentleman with half-a-dozen imaginary ailments. Something stronger than himself made him linger beyond the time of a conventional call—made him row over to land next day, and the day after, contriving to meet Helen Mannering on the water-front where the tourist shops display their allurements and all the little world of Rovellasco saunters.

He even suffered gladly the querulous egoism of Colonel Padgett so that he might be near Mrs. Mannering. Dr. Wycherley, to whom nothing was hidden, spoke to him in gentle sympathy one evening when Carruthers sat musing under his favourite magnolia-tree.

"A woman in a thousand," said the doctor.

"In a million," answered Carruthers.

There was silence, a silence of mutual understanding.

"Why not?" asked the doctor. His sensitive left hand was rapidly drawing tiny portraits—perfect miniatures—of Mrs. Mannering on a scrap of paper.

"Yes; why not?" echoed Carruthers. "It's a dog's life for her . . . I could make her ideally happy . . . There is sympathy between us beyond anything I have ever felt . . . You believe in the idea of one's affinity, doctor?"

"I do not know," returned Dr. Wycherley gravely and slowly. "As a scientist, I say that I do not know. One feels that it is true, but there is no evidence. If there is only one affinity for each of us in all this wide world, what are the chances of meeting? Infinitesimal . . . No; there is no evidence. It is one of my problems."

So Carruthers took courage in hand,



"Be frank with me, Helen. Be fair to me!" (Page 718.)

and contrived his opportunity. He spoke deeply and passionately, breathing fast :

"Colonel Padgett tells me that you are moving soon. I mustn't wait, I mustn't let this opportunity slip by. Helen, since the world began, we were made for one another—every fibre in me tells me that it is true. I am full-tide with happiness, but it must be shared, and with you only can I share it. I cannot give you wealth or position, but I can give you all that is best in myself. Will you take me as I am? Look me in the eyes, and read my love."

He caught at her hands. She drew them away and, to his astonishment, began to weep softly but as though her heart were broken.

"I can't; I can't!" she answered. "Don't you see or feel? Has love made you blind?"

"But I don't understand. Do you mean that you are tied—that you have a husband alive? I understood that your husband was dead. Or is your love given elsewhere?"

"No, no!"

"Be frank with me, Helen. Be fair to me! Have I been too impetuous; am I selfish in pressing my love upon you before your answering love has had time to grow?"

She looked out upon the witchery of night on lake and mountain, as though to seek inspiration or courage from them, and when at length she turned to him again, her voice was firm with resolve:

"What you have said has done me honour. Don't think that I rate lightly what you have offered me. But you are not yourself—this is a moment of madness. Were I to accept, it might mean a lifetime's misery—for both of us. Look me in the eyes, look at me well!"

Carruthers looked, puzzled, confessed himself at sea:

"I don't understand. I only see what is very beautiful to me and what I hold very dear. My love, I see you for what you are, and with that a lifetime would hold no regrets."

"Give me till to-morrow," said Helen suddenly. Joyfully he acquiesced, and in the moonlight saw her back to her hotel.

"In the morning I come for my answer," he murmured as he said good-night.

But in the morning he found only

Colonel Padgett, raging fussily and repetitiously:

"By gad, sir, it's outrageous, positively outrageous! Runs away without saying a word—leaves me to shift for myself! Don't you realise, sir, that she was paid, *paid* to look after me? How am I to go for my morning walk? This will make me seriously ill! I'm feeling damnable twinges already; I never heard of anything so heartless in all my born days. It's outrageous, sir, positively outrageous! I'll put the police on her track! Leaves me a note to say that she has to run away—gives no reason—gives no address. I'll report her to the nursing agency; I'll have her cashiered! I never heard of anything so disgraceful in all my born days!"

"Did Mrs. Mannering leave any note for me?" interrupted Carruthers.

"How do I know? D'you think I've had any time to——"

But Carruthers had made off to the hotel bureau, where the cashier handed him an envelope, which he tore open eagerly. It contained only a little bag of dried herbs and a brief note:

"All night I have wrestled with temptation, Miles. I have fought and conquered; I will not spoil your life again. This little bag of herbs will explain you everything. 'Rosemary for remembrance.' Good-bye!—HELEN."

He put the bag—*her* bag—to his lips, and in his brain there was as it were a snapping and rending of the stitches that bound up the wounded memory. He had known that little bag of dried herbs before. But where—where? In Heaven's name, where? He felt the question was driving him mad—the torture was unbearable. At the railway-station he found she had taken a ticket for Milan. There was no train in that direction till the afternoon. At Milan she would be lost—might take train again to anywhere. What could he do?

Then the soothing shadow of the mental healer came over the glare in his mind, and he rowed feverishly back to Isola Salvatore. Dr. Wycherley's eyes lighted up with the enthusiasm of the scientist as Carruthers explained and showed him the letter.

"Splendid! Splendid!" said the doctor. "Your experience is the first direct evidence

of the affinity theory that, so far as my knowledge goes, has ever been obtained. This is well worth the trouble of the experiment!" Then he added, with his gentle, ironic touch: "The zeal of the scientist—it forgets the patient! Excuse me, Carruthers, for my scientific selfishness. Be quite easy in mind—I will surely find her for you. If you let me put you to sleep, it will soothe the brain."

"But how can you find Helen? She has deliberately run away. She will cover up her tracks."

"The bag of herbs," answered the doctor. "It is very personal to her. It is charged with her personality. Rolf!"

The big shaggy-haired dog trotted up to him, wagging its tail.

"Sleep!" commanded Dr. Wycherley, sharply.

Instantly the dog rolled over on its side, inert.

"His suggestibility is very highly developed," explained the doctor, while with his left hand he made rapid little sketches of Rolf in half-a-dozen different attitudes; "and nowadays a mere command will send him into deep hypnosis. It took me a long, long while to train him. At one time, I nearly gave it up in despair; then I hit on a new way to . . . But this will not interest you. I will just say briefly that in hypnosis proper the hyperæsthesia of the senses is of the order five to ten in men and women—that is, their sense perceptions become five to ten times keener than in the normal working state. This is a matter of everyday knowledge. But what is not generally known is the effect in the case of animals. I have found most astonishing magnification of the senses. With Rolf, the hyperæsthesia in hypnosis is of the order twenty-fold and more. I will take him to Milan and start him on the trail. He will succeed. Watch."

He put the bag of herbs to Rolf's nose, and the dog at once jumped up and began with closed eyes uncannily to nose the garden for a trail.

"Stop!" commanded the doctor, and the dog obediently stood still, rigid.

"Now let me put you to sleep?" suggested Dr. Wycherley gently, and Carruthers acquiesced.

When Carruthers woke again, he found

Helen by his side, watching him in silence. He held out his arms:

"You are back again. Thank God!"

"Wait!" said Helen. "Let me explain. Don't you really know me, Miles? Dr. Wycherley tells me you have forgotten."

"Miles! Why do you call me Miles?"

"I was your wife. I was very young and very foolish. If only you had been a little more patient! Or I more controlled! It was a very little thing that caused the first breach between us. You remember the night I wanted to go to the Hilary ball—what an age ago it seems!—and you——"

"I don't remember anything like that. Surely you are imagining——"

"You divorced me."

"How could I? I only met you on the lake——"

"You gave me a sum of money for my maintenance, but a few years after I was tricked out of it by a Continental swindler. I was forced to turn to and earn my living, and I took up nursing as a profession. Naturally I changed my name. When I met you here at Rovellasco, I didn't recognise you at first—you have changed so, Miles—but eventually the little mannerisms, the little tricks of speech told me it was you. That night on the terrace you used the same words as when——"

"But I don't remember! What does it all matter?"

Helen looked at him searchingly.

"You divorced me," she answered slowly, "and you had cause."

"But I don't remember. Can't you see, Helen, that I don't *want* to remember? Someone told me some time that to forget is to be happy. He was right. I want only you, Helen, you as you are to-day, as I feel and know you are. What has the girl you speak of to do with the woman I love to-day? *She* belongs to the past—you belong to the present and the future——"

"We have to live with our past, Miles."

"A horrible creed! A devilish creed! Let the dead past moulder with its dead! Say, rather, we have to live with our future. That is *my* creed—will you make it *yours*, Helen?"

Helen bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

MAX RITTENBERG.



ZERO

A COMPLETE SHORT STORY

By

BARRY PAIN

Illustrated by Harry Rountree

JAMES SMITH was a trainer and exhibitor of performing dogs. His age was forty-five, but on the stage he looked less, moving always with an alertness suggestive of youth. His face was dominant, but not cruel. He never petted a dog. On the other hand, he never thrashed a dog, unless he considered that the dog had deserved it. He had small eyes and a strong jaw. He was somewhat undersized, and his body was lean and hard. This morning, clad in a well-cut flannel suit, and wearing a straw hat, he sat on the steps of a bathing-machine on the beach at Helmstone. He was waiting for the man inside the machine

to come out. Meanwhile he made himself a cigarette, rolling it on his leg with one hand, and securing the paper by a small miracle instead of by gum.

As he lit the cigarette the door of the bathing-machine opened, and a tall young man of athletic build came out. He was no better dressed than James Smith. At the same time, it was just as obvious that he was a gentleman as that Smith was not.

"Hullo!" said the young man. "You're all right again, I see. What was it—touch of cramp?"

"No, sir," said Smith. "I'm not a strong swimmer, and I've done no sea-

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bathing before. I never meant to get out of my depth, but the current took me. What I want now is to do something to show my gratitude."

"Gratitude be blowed!" said the young man cheerfully. "It was no trouble to me, and I happened to be there."

"Well, sir," said Smith, "will you let me give you a dog? I've got some very good dogs. I should take it as a favour if you would."

He took from a russia-leather case a clean professional card, and presented it to the young man.

"That, of course, is not my real name. That's just the French name they've put on the programmes. I'm James Smith, and I have a two weeks' engagement at the Hippodrome here. I've got my dogs in a stable not far from there."

The young man glanced at his watch.

"Well," he said, "I've got nothing to do this morning. I'll go and have a look at the dogs, at any rate. They're a pretty clever lot, I suppose?"

"They can do what they've been taught," said Smith; "all except one of them, and he can do what no man can teach him."

There was a great noise when they entered the stables. Twenty dogs, most of them black poodles, all tried to talk at once. Smith said something decisively, but quietly, and the dogs became silent again. Smith made a sign to one of the poodles and held out his walking-stick. It looked quite impossible, but the dog went over it.

"My word! But that's a wonderful jump!" said the young man.

"It is," said Smith. "You won't find another dog of that breed in this country that can do the same. He's yours, if you like to take him."

"No; hang it all! I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to take a dog which you can use professionally. What about the beggar that you said you could not teach?"

Smith pointed to a huge brindled bulldog, who lay in one corner of the stable absolutely motionless, watching them intently.

"That's the one," he said. "He's never been on the stage at all. He couldn't even be taught to fetch and carry."

"And you just keep him because you're fond of him?"

"Fond of him? No, I'm not fond of dogs. They're my livelihood, and I don't

do so badly out of it. But I'm not fond of 'em—know too much about 'em."

"Then what do you keep him for?"

"You may call it a sense of justice, or you may call it curiosity. He's a rum 'un, that dog is, and no mistake."

"In what way rum?"

"I'll tell you. He's a dog that sees dangers ahead. He knows when things are going to happen. I had him as a puppy, and when I found I could teach him nothing, I made up my mind to get quit of him. I was going off by train that day to a village fifteen miles away, and I knew a man there whom I thought might take a fancy to Zero."

"Zero, you call him?"

"Yes; that was a bit of my fun. As a performing dog he was just absolutely last—number nought, see? Well, as I was saying, there was I on the platform with the dog at my heel and the ticket in my hand. Just as I was going to get into the train, he made a jump for that ticket, caught it in his mouth and bolted with it, nipping in among a lot of milk-cans. I called him, and he wouldn't come out. Then I went in after him, and he bolted again. By the time I did get him I had missed my train, and I didn't give him half a jolly good hiding for it, I don't think! If I'd gone by that train I shouldn't have been talking to you now. Collision three miles from the station. Well, you don't apologise to a dog. All I could do was to keep him. But that wasn't the only instance. The beggar knows things."

"Apparently he didn't know that you were going to drown yourself this morning."

"If he knew anything about it, he knew that I wasn't."

"Good-tempered dog?"

"Oh, all bulldogs are safe! You want to look after him with collies. He doesn't like 'em. If he gets hold of one, it's bad for the collie. Otherwise a baby could handle him."

Zero had crossed over to them, and the young man stooped down and patted him. The dog expressed delight.

"I can send him round to your hotel," said Smith; "or, for that matter, he'd follow you. He's taken a fancy to you, he has."

"Look here," said the young man, "let me buy him. I'm not a millionaire, but I can afford to buy a dog. I'd like to have this one, and there's no reason on earth why you should give him to me."



A loud crash caused Staines to look round. A heavy stone coping had fallen from a roof, and if the dog had not brought him back it would have fallen on him.

"You'd like to have him, and I can afford to give him to you, and I want to give him to you. You must let a man indulge his sense of gratitude. It's only fair."

"Very well, if you say so. Many thanks. I'll step over to the Hippodrome and see your show to-night."

"Do. You'll be surprised."

The two men talked for a few moments longer, and then Zero's new owner said that he must be getting back to lunch

"You really think the dog will follow me?" he said. "I don't want to take a lead?"

"I know he'll follow you. I tell you I know dogs. They take fancies sometimes. You can take that dog out, and if I call him back myself he wouldn't come."

"I bet you a sovereign he would."

"I'll take that," said Smith. "You go on with him, and I'll wait here."

The young man walked a few yards away

with the dog at his heels, and then Smith called the dog back, loudly and insistently. The dog did not give the slightest sign that he had heard anything at all. When his master stood still, he remained standing patiently at his heel, and never once looked back.

The young man laughed as he took out his sovereign-case.

"Queer chap, Zero. Well, you've won, Mr. Smith. Catch!"

Mr. Smith caught the sovereign adroitly, and went back into the stable.

"Yes," he said to the cleverest of the black poodles, "I don't know that I wouldn't sooner he'd taken you."

It was seldom that Smith addressed any of his dogs, except to give an order. The poodle did not know what to make of it. He whined faintly.

Richard Staines went back to his hotel, with Zero at his heels. He had his own sitting-room opening into his bedroom at the hotel, and he intended to keep the dog there at night. This was against the laws of the hotel. Therefore Staines had to pause a few moments in the hall to get the laws altered. One of the arguments he used was that he would only be there two days longer, and it would not matter for so short a time. The other argument was bribery and corruption. After which he and Zero went up in the lift together.

II.

Staines was a partner in succession to his father in an old-established firm of stockbrokers with a good connection. He had a small flat in St. James's Place, and thither he brought Zero. Zero accepted metropolitan life philosophically. There was a dingy cat in the basement of St. James's Place, and he was quite willing to make friends with her. He looked mildly puzzled at her definite assurance that she would kill him if he came a step nearer. It never occurred to him to attempt to injure her. But for one slight lapse—he had killed a collie, and cost Staines compensation—his behaviour was admirable. He was fortunate in having a master who was fond of outdoor life, and not at all fond of London. Every week-end, and occasionally on a fine afternoon, if business was slack, he got away into the country. Zero never quite seemed to understand the terror which his appearance inspired in some

young or foolish people. When children rushed from him shrieking, he would look up at his master as much as to say, "Can you understand this?" And he was careful not to increase their terror by running after them.

One day in the Park a muddy-faced little girl of six, who feared nothing at all, came up and patted him, examined his teeth with curious interest, and finally sat on him. These attentions Zero received with great joy. Weeks passed, and he had not given the slightest sign of the curious instinct with which his former master had credited him.

Staines liked him, principally because he so obviously liked Staines. Staines thought him a faithful and affectionate beast, with nothing to distinguish him from the normal. When he recalled Smith's story of the snatched railway ticket, he explained it all as a chance. These flukes did happen sometimes.

And then one afternoon he went to call upon the Murrays—a practice that was becoming rather common with him—and as Jane was particularly fond of Zero, Zero accompanied him. When they reached the square, Zero sat down on the pavement. Staines called him, and the dog wagged his tail, but did not move. Staines went on without him, but presently had to stop, for Zero had now changed his tactics, and was running round and round Staines's legs. The incident of the railway ticket flashed across his mind. He was a business man, and not superstitious. However, it did not matter to him in the least which two sides of the square he took, and he determined to turn back and take the other two sides, and see what would happen. As soon as he turned back, Zero followed at heel in his usual quiet and unobtrusive manner.

A loud crash caused him to look round. A heavy stone coping had fallen from a roof, and if the dog had not brought him back it would have fallen upon him. Here was a nice little story with a mildly sensational interest for Staines to tell over the teacups.

Mr. Murray was matter-of-fact.

"Your story is true, of course," he said. "Your dog did make you take the other two sides of the square, and the fact that you turned back probably saved your life. But, all the same, the dog didn't know. By what means could the brain of a dog

recognise the imminent dissolution of part of the roof of a house?"

"Zero did know," said Jane. She was Mr. Murray's only daughter, and without being wildly beautiful was an extremely pleasing and friendly young woman to look at. At present she was feeding Zero with thin bread-and-butter. Zero had been told, even by Jane herself, that this form of diet was bad for his figure, but he accepted it with resignation—rather an enthusiastic kind of resignation.

"What makes you say that Zero knew?" her father asked, with indulgent superiority.

"Because I know he knew," said Jane firmly and finally.

"And then," said Mr. Murray, "women tell us they ought to have the vote."

"Miss Murray," said Richard firmly, "that dog is not to be fed any more, please."

"Last piece," said Jane. "And he's promised to do Swedish exercises."

Richard was inclined to agree with Mr. Murray. The coincidence was again remarkable; it might even be called very extraordinary. And, given a choice of two things, Richard preferred to believe the easier. Why, fond though he was of Zero, he had to admit that the dog was not even clever.

He had tried to teach Zero to find a hidden biscuit, but though he had hidden the biscuit in all manner of places he had never yet selected a place that Zero had been able to discover. He was just a dear old fool of a bulldog, and it was absurd to suppose that he was a miracle.

But Jane Murray remained firm in her belief, and even condescended to be serious about it.

"Look here," she said, "if you put your horse at a jump, and you're feeling a bit shy of it yourself, do you mean to say the horse doesn't know?"

"Of course he knows. But he only knows it by the way you ride him."

"Well, I've had it happen to me. All I can say is that I wasn't conscious of riding any differently. It was my first season in Ireland, and I wasn't used to the walls. I said to myself, 'It's got to be.' I did really mean to get over. But the horse knew the funk in my head and refused. However, I'll give you another point. How do you explain the homing instinct of animals?"

"I've never thought about it. I suppose when a pigeon gets up high it can see no end of a distance."

"That won't do. Dogs and cats have the same instinct—especially cats. For that matter, crabs have been taken from the sea and returned to it again at a point eighty miles away, and have found their way back. It's not done by sight, scent or hearing. It must be done by some special sense which they have got and we have not."

"It sounds plausible."

"It's the only possible explanation. And when once we've admitted that animals have a special sense which we have not, I don't quite see how we are to say what the limitations of that sense are. It is not really a bit more wonderful that Zero should have the sense of impending danger than that a crab, eighty miles from home, should be able to find its way back."

"Well, you may be right. I wish now that I'd asked that chap Smith a bit more about the dog."

A few days later one of the partners in Richard's business announced his intention of getting married. He was a junior partner, two years younger than Richard.

"Well, Bill," said Richard, after he had offered his congratulations, "what shall I give you for a wedding-present?"

"Give us that dog of yours."

"Never. Try again."

"Oh, I was only rotting. But, seriously, I'd as soon have a dog as anything. Not a bulldog—they're too ugly."

"It's a good, honest kind of ugliness. What breed, then?"

"Gwen's keen on black poodles."

That settled it. Richard hunted up Smith's card. He had always meant to do some business with the man if he got an opportunity, and here was the opportunity. On the following day he journeyed to Wandsworth and found Smith. Smith looked less spruce and prosperous than before. He did not actually declare that the performing dog had had his day, but he admitted that business was not what it had been.

"Too many of us in it. And, I tell you, I'm afraid to bring out a new idea—it's pinched before you've had a week's use of it. Public's a bit off it, too. I'm doing practically nothing with the 'alls. I train for others, and I'm trying to build up a

business as a dealer. Only first-class dogs, mind."

"That's what I want. I came here to buy a dog."

"Let's see. Bulldogs were your fancy. Well, I've got one of the Stone breed that's won the only time it was shown and will win again."

"This is not for myself. It's a present. Black poodle."

"I see. Well, you've come to the right market. How far are you prepared to go?"

"Show me a really valuable dog and I will pay the real value. I'm not buying for the show-bench. But I want the best breed, good health, good temper, cleverness and training—two years old for choice."

"Ask enough," said Smith, smiling. "Well, if you don't mind stepping into the yard I can fit you. I'm asking twenty guineas, and he's worth every penny of it—he'd bring that money back, to anybody who cared to take it, before a year was out."

The dog was shown—an aristocrat with qualities of temper and intelligence not always to be found in the aristocrat. Richard Staines thought he would be paying quite enough, but decided to pay it. He returned to the house to write his cheque.

"There you are, Mr. Smith. By the way, do you remember Zero, the dog you gave me? He's sitting in my taxi outside."

"I remember him. He'd never win prizes for anybody—not like that poodle you've just bought. You couldn't teach him anything either. But he could see ahead, that dog could."

Smith heard how Richard Staines had been saved from the falling roof, and evinced no surprise at it at all. "Yes," he said, "that dog always knew. Did I tell you about the milk?"

"No. What was that?"

"Me and Cowbit next door got our milk from the same man. I went out one morning to take the can in, when Zero came bullocking past me and knocked the can over. He never tried to drink the milk that was spilled, but just stood there, wagging his old tail. Mind you, sir, that was after he had saved me from the train smash. 'Well,' I said to him, 'I suppose you know;' and I went in to Cowbit's to tell them not to touch that milk. Cowbit laughed at the story, and took milk in his

tea. But his missus wouldn't have any, and wouldn't let the baby have none either. Cowbit was ill for days and pretty near died. Mineral poison it was, from one of the milk-pans going wrong."

"How do you suppose the dog knew?"

"Me suppose? Why, I never asked myself the question. He did know—that was all about it. Still, if I had to explain it, I should say it was some kind of an instinct."

And Richard mercifully forbore to ask Mr. Smith how he would explain that particular kind of instinct.

III.

Richard was best-man at his partner's wedding. He afterwards attended a crowded reception. It was too crowded; and there were far too many people there who wanted to talk to Jane Murray. She was popular, and there was a group round her all the time. Not for five minutes could Richard get her to himself. It was this selfishness on the part of others which depressed him, not the reception champagne, which was no worse than is usual on such occasions.

The crowds bored him, and when he got back to his flat the solitude bored him. Not even Zero was there. Richard's valet had taken the dog out for exercise; this had been done in obedience to Richard's own orders, but it now seemed to him in the light of a grievance. The grievance became more acute when his servant returned without the dog.

"Very sorry, sir; I wouldn't have had it happen for anything. I was walking in Regent's Park, with the dog at my heels, and all of a sudden he made a bolt for it. I whistled and called, but he went straight on. And when I started running after him, he made a dash into a big shrubbery. That was how he foxed me, sir. While I was hunting him on one side, he must have bolted out on the other. Never known the dog act like that before. It was just as if something had come over him. Speaking in a general way——"

"Well, what did you do?" asked Richard sharply.

"I spoke to the park-keepers, and to a couple of policemen outside, and then I went on to Scotland Yard. The address is on the collar, sir. I should think there's no doubt you'll——"



As Jane neared the gate, Zero became disquieted. He caught hold of her dress and tried to drag her back.

"That'll do!" snapped Richard. "I thought you could be trusted to take a dog out, at any rate. Well, my mistake."

With a further expression of contrition, the man withdrew, and almost instantly the telephone-bell on Richard's desk rang sharply.

He went slowly to the telephone, and managed to put the concentration of weariness and disgust into the word "Hallo!"

The voice that answered him was the voice of Mr. Murray.

"That you, Staines? . . . Right—yes, quite well, thanks. . . . I wanted to say when Jane got back this evening she found Zero waiting for her outside our front door. . . . He's here now, and seems quite cheerful about it. . . . Thought you might like to know."

Richard rapidly changed his tone of dejection for that of social enthusiasm. He thanked profusely. He would send for the dog at once.

"Well, look here," said Mr. Murray: "Jane and I have got a night off—dining alone. If by any chance you're free, I wish you'd join us. Then you can take the intelligent hound back with you."

Richard said that he was free, which was a lie; and that he would be delighted to come, which was perfectly true.

He subsequently rang up a man at his club, cancelled an engagement on the score of ill-health, and went to dress. Such was his elation that he even condescended to tell his servant that the dog had been found and was all right.

Zero had done wrong. He must have known that he had done wrong. But he welcomed his master with gambols in the manner of an ecstatic bullock, and showed no sign of penitence at all. It was the habit of Richard to punish a dog that had done wrong, but he did not punish Zero. He called him a silly old idiot, and asked him what he thought he had been doing, but Zero recognised that this was badinage, and exercised his tail furiously.

At dinner, Mr. Murray said that Zero was an interesting problem. The dog was apparently a fine judge at sight of the stability of structures, but could not find his way home.

"That's not proved," said Richard, laughing. "He knew his way home all right, but he was trying to better himself. He's not fed at tea-time in St. James's Place."

"He's had nothing here," said Jane.

"Really, Jane?" said her father.

"Practically nothing. A few biscuits and the least little bit of wedding-cake for luck."

"Pity I didn't take him to the reception; then he could have had a vanilla ice as well."

"Wrong," said Jane. "They hadn't got vanilla—only the esoteric sorts. I know, because I tried. Never you mind, Zero. When the election comes on, you shall wear papa's colours round your strengthly neck and kill all the colliers of the opposition."

"By the way," said Richard, "how's old Benham?"

"Poor old chap, he's still dying," said Mr. Murray. "It makes me feel a bit like a vulture, waiting for his death like this. Still, I suppose it can't be helped."

Benham was the sitting member for Sidlington, and Mr. Murray had been predestined to succeed him. Murray had fought two forlorn hopes for his Party, and had pulled down majorities. He had fairly earned Sidlington—an absolutely safe seat. He had moderate means and no occupation. He had taken up politics ten years before—shortly after the death of his wife—and had found them a game that precisely suited him.

The discussion for the remainder of dinner was mostly political, and Jane—as was generally the case when she chose to be serious—showed herself to be a remarkably well-informed and intelligent young woman.

"I've no chance; she's too good for me," said Richard to himself—by no means for the first time—as he looked at her and listened to her with admiration.

Jane had just left the two men to their cigars when a servant entered with a card for Mr. Murray.

"Where have you put him?" he asked the man.

"The gentleman is in the library, sir."

"Good! Say I'll be with him directly. Awfully sorry, Staines; this is a chap from Sidlington, and rather an important old cock down there."

"Go to him, of course. That's all right."

"I'm afraid I must. But here's the port and here's the cigars. When you get tired of solitude, you'll find Jane in the drawing-room. Smoking's allowed there, you know."

Staines got tired of solitude very soon. In the drawing-room the conversation between Jane and himself took a new note of earnestness and intimacy. Zero slept placidly through it all.

An hour later Mr. Murray came back to the drawing-room with the news of Benham's death. He in return received, with goodwill and no surprise, the news that a marriage had been arranged, and would shortly take place, between his daughter and Richard Staines.

III.

During the engagement, which was brief, Zero found that two people—of whom his master was one—had very little time to talk to him, but he was not absolutely forgotten.

"What are we to do with Zero while we're away?" asked Richard.

"Could we take him with us?" asked Miss Murray.

"I don't think so," said Richard. "There would be bother at these foreign hotels; and there's the quarantine to think about."

"Suppose I said that if Zero didn't go, I wouldn't go either?"

"Quite simple. In that case, I should go alone."

And then they both laughed, being somewhat easily pleased at that time. Zero was offered to Mr. Murray temporarily as an election mascot, but Mr. Murray was not taking any risks—one of his principal supporters had a favourite collie. Finally, it was decided that Zero should pay a visit to his former master, Smith, until his master returned. He made one brief appearance at the wedding reception, where his supreme but honest ugliness conquered the heart of every nice woman present. He refused champagne, foie-gras sandwiches, and vanilla ices offered to him by the enthusiastic and indiscreet. However, he managed to find Jane, and Jane found bread-and-butter until word was brought that a person of the name of Smith had called for the dog.

"Bit fat, you are," said Smith, as he ripped the white rosette off the dog's collar. "Been doing yourself too well. Ah, now you're going to live healthy!"

Smith was as good as his word. Zero was sufficiently and properly fed, and given plenty of exercise. He mixed with some very aristocratic canine society,

where the sweetness of his temper was much commended and imposed upon. After two months his master called for him, and Zero once more behaved like an ecstatic bullock.

"Yes," said Smith, "he's in good condition, as you say. Otherwise, he's not much changed. He's as big a fool as ever he was. If a toy Pom growls at him, he runs away; and if a collie tries to get past him alive—well, it can't. He'd tear the throat out of any man as struck you, and if the cat next door spits at him he goes and hides in the rhubarb."

"Seen any more of that wonderful instinct of his?"

"No, sir, I have not. But I should have done if there had been any occasion for it. It's a fact that I never feel so safe as I do when I've got that dog here. Don't you believe in it yourself, sir?"

"Sometimes I do—Mrs. Staines does absolutely. If there's nothing in it, then there has been the most extraordinary lot of coincidences I ever came across."

Richard Staines and his wife had agreed that they would live principally in the country, and one day during their engagement Jane took Richard down to Selsdon Bois to show him the house of her dreams, known to the Post Office as Midway. Then, when he came to select, he would know the kind of thing to look for. Jane had known Midway in her childhood, and had loved its wide and gentle staircases, its fine Jacobean panelling, its stone roof, and its old garden with the paved walks between yew hedges.

"Well," said Richard, "if you are so keen on the place, why shouldn't we wait for a chance to get it, instead of looking for something more or less like it?"

"Because you can't," said Jane. "We're general public, and general public is never allowed to buy a place like Midway. People live in it till they die, and then leave it to the person they love best, and that person lives in it till he dies. And so on again. It never comes into the market. Things that are really valuable hardly ever do."

The conversation took place in the train which was conveying them to Selsdon Bois.

"Ah, well," said Richard, "what is there? It needn't be very big to be too big for us."

"Not a big house at all. I never counted, but I should think about twenty rooms." She made guesses as to acreage of garden, orchard, and grass-land. She admitted that they were merely guesses. "The only thing that I really remember is that it was thirty-six acres in all. Could we do it?"

"Yes," said Richard; "we ought to be able to do that."

"Still, it doesn't matter," said Jane despondently, "because, of course, places like that are never to be got."

Then they stepped out on to the platform of Selsdon Bois Station, where a man was busily pasting up a bill. It announced the sale by auction, unless previously disposed of, of Midway.

"Miracle!" said Jane, subsiding gracefully on to a milk-can. "It's ours!"

And a fortnight later it was really theirs. The house was as delightful as Jane had said, but it was an old house, and during the last ten years had not been well kept up. There was a good deal to be done to make it quite comfortable and satisfactory. The work was to have been finished by the time Richard and his wife returned from the honeymoon.

"It's been simply funny the way we've been kept back," said the builder cheerfully. "But you might be able to get in, say, in another week or so."

They remained for a month in town, and this gave Jane time to discover that it was not possible to teach Zero to do trust-and-paid-for, and to look up a really admirable train by which Richard might travel from Selsdon Bois to the City every weekday morning.

"Yes," said Richard, a little doubtfully, "it's quite a good train, but——"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing. I shall probably take it whenever I go up, though it's a bit earlier than is absolutely necessary. You see, I don't regard my presence at the office as so essential as I once did. My partners are most able and trustworthy men, and they like the work. Of course, I shall keep an eye on things."

"Then how many days a week will you go up?"

"Well, just at first I shall go up—er—from time to time."

"Come here, Zero," said Jane. "See that man? He's idle. Kill him!"

"Idle? Why, I shall have any amount of things to do down at Midway! Gardeners and grooms want a deal of looking after at first, until they pick up the way you want things done. Then there's that car your father gave us. I've got to learn how to drive it; I've got to know all about its blessed works right up to the very last word. The man who don't is open to be robbed and fooled by his chauffeur. That won't be done in a week. Then I've had an idea that we might lay out a golf-course—quite a small affair, just for practice."

"Richard, you're a genius! (You needn't bite him after all, Zero.) That will be the very thing for guests on Sunday afternoons—not to mention us ourselves."

"I was thinking principally of us ourselves."

"Where is that big-scale plan of the land? We'll pin it down flat on the table, and start arranging it now. We shall probably have to alter it all afterwards, but that don't matter."

IV.

Six years had passed; and Zero had got a new master, a somewhat dictatorial gentleman, but with genuine goodness of heart, aged five, bearing the same name as his father, Richard Staines, but never by any chance addressed by it. His father called him Dick. His mother called him by various fond and foolish appellations. He was known to the servants of the household as the Emperor. He had two sisters, whom he always spoke of collectively as "the children." He always spoke of Zero as "my dog."

Zero was rather an old dog now, but hale and hearty. In his own circle he was highly valued, but his formidable appearance still struck terror among strangers, willing though he was to make friends with them. The tradespeople, who had at first approached very delicately, had now grown used to him. But the tramp or hawker who entered the garden at Midway, and found Zero looking at him pensively, as a rule retired quickly to see if the road was still there. No further instance had occurred of Zero's mysterious powers, and in consequence they tended to become legendary. Richard Staines had now definitely adopted the theory of coincidence.

"Zero's a good old friend of mine, and

"I love him," he said. "But we must give up pretending he's a miracle." Jane's faith however, remained unshaken.

And then, one summer evening, Dick came into the drawing-room with determination in his face.

"Mother," he said, "I want a stick or whip, please."

"Well, now," said Jane, "what for?"

"To beat my dog with. He's got to be punished."

"That's a pity, Dickywick. What's he been doing?"

"He won't let me go out into the road. Every time he caught hold of my coat and pulled me back. He's most frightfully strong, and he pulled me over once. He want's a lamming."

"I wonder if he would let me go out?" said Jane. "Let's go and see, shall we?"

"Right-oh," said Dick, perfectly satisfied.

In the garden they found Zero cheerful and quite unrepentant. As a rule, he rushed to the gate in the hopes of being taken out for a run. But this evening, as Jane neared the gate, he became disquieted. He caught hold of her dress and tried to drag her back. He ran round and round her, whimpering. He flung himself in front of her feet.

"Now, you see," said Dick triumphantly.

"Yes, I see."

"Well, I shall go and fetch a stick."

"Oh, no. Zero does not want us to go out because he believes there's some danger on the road."

"O-o-oh! Do you really mean it?"

"Honest Injun."

"Then he's not a bad dog at all, and I told him he was. Come here, Zero." He patted the dog's head. "You're a good dog really. My mistake. Sorry. What are you laughing at, mother? That's what Tom always says. Now let's go and see the danger on the road."

"Well, it wouldn't be quite fair to Zero, after all the trouble he's taken. Besides, I want to see the rabbits at their games. They ought to be out just now."

"All right," said Dick. "You follow me, and I'll show you them. But you musn't make the least sound. You must be very Red-Indian."

Dick's mother followed him obediently, and was very Red-Indian. The rabbits lived in a high bank just beyond the far

end of the garden, and what the gardener had said about them before the wire-netting came could not be printed. Jane watched the rabbits, and conversed about them in the hoarse whisper enjoined by her son, but she was thinking principally about Zero.

Then Dick went to bed, and his father came back from the City. He went up at least one day a week, and came back full of aggressive virtue and likely to refer to himself as a man who earned his own living, thank Heaven.

At dinner Richard said: "By the way, I'd been meaning to speak of it—what's the matter with Zero?"

"Why?"

"He won't leave the gate. He was there when I drove in. I called him in, but he went back almost directly. I saw him through the window as I was dressing, and he was still there—lying quite still, with his eyes glued on the road."

And then Jane recounted the experience of Dick and herself.

"You may laugh, Richard, but something is going to happen, and Zero knows what it will be."

"Well," said Richard, "if anybody is proposing to burglarise us to-night, I don't envy him the preliminaries with Zero. But, of course, it may be nothing. All the same, I've always said there ought to be a lodge at that gate."

But to this Jane was most firmly opposed. A new semi-artistic red-brick lodge would be out of keeping with Midway altogether. "And what are you going to do about Zero?"

"Oh, anything you like. What do you propose?"

"I don't know what to say. Whatever is going to happen, apparently Zero thinks he can tackle it by himself. Still, you might have your revolver somewhere handy to-night."

"I will," said Richard.

Zero remained at his post until the dawn, and then came a black speck on the white road. Zero stood up and growled. The skin on his back moved.

Down the road came a lean, black retriever, snapping aimlessly, foam dropping from his jaws. Zero sprang at him and was thrown down and bitten. At his second spring he got hold and kept it. The two dogs rolled off the road, and into the ditch.

At breakfast, next morning, Richard was innocuously humorous on the subject of revolvers, burglars and clairvoyant bulldogs. He was interrupted by a servant, who announced that Mr. Hammond wished to speak to him for a moment.

"Right," said Richard. "Where is he?"

"He is just outside, sir," said the man. "Mr. Hammond would not come in."

Hammond was a neighbour of Richard's, a robust and heavily built man. As a rule he was a cheerful sportsman, but this morning his countenance was troubled. His clothes were covered with dust, and he looked generally dishevelled.

"Hallo, Jim," said Richard cheerily. "How goes it? You look as if you'd been out all night."

"I have," said Hammond grimly. "So have several other men."

"Why? What's up?"

"Outbreak of rabies at Harker's farm. He shot one of the dogs, but the other got away. There must have been some damned mismanagement. A lot of us have been out trying to find the brute all night."

"But, by Jove, this is most awfully serious. Can't I help? I'm ready to start now if you like."

"Thanks, but I found the dog five minutes ago—dead in a ditch not twenty yards from your gate. He's there still."

"Who shot him?"

"Nobody. That's the trouble. He had been killed by another dog, as you'll see when you look at his windpipe. The chances are the other dog got bitten or scratched, and he'll carry on the infection. It's the other dog we've got to hunt."

"Could it be——" Richard paused.

"I'm afraid so," said Hammond. "Not many dogs would tackle a mad retriever, but your bulldog would. And it was close to your gate that the retriever was killed."

"If you'll wait half a minute, I'll see where Zero is."

But the dog was not to be found. Nobody had seen him that morning. In truth, Richard had not expected to find him. He left word that if the dog came back he was to be shut up in an empty stable. And then he and Hammond went out together.

"You've got a revolver, I suppose," said Richard.

"I don't hunt mad dogs without one. This is most awfully hard lines on you, Staines. He was a ripping good dog, Zero was."

"He was. It's Dick I'm thinking about. The dog was a great pal of his."

They found young Harker watching by the dead retriever. He explained gloomily that he had sent a boy for a cart. The body would be taken back and buried in lime. "And even then, sir, we've not got the dog that killed him."

"We're just going to get him," said Richard quietly.

They walked on in silence for a mile, and then at a turn of the road they saw Zero, apparently asleep in the sunlight in the white dust.

"I ought to do this," said Richard, "but I wish you would."

"Right, old chap. It'll be over in a moment, and he'll be dead before he knows he's hurt. Look the other way."

Richard turned round and waited, as it seemed to him for a long time, waiting for the shot. Suddenly he heard Hammond's voice behind him.

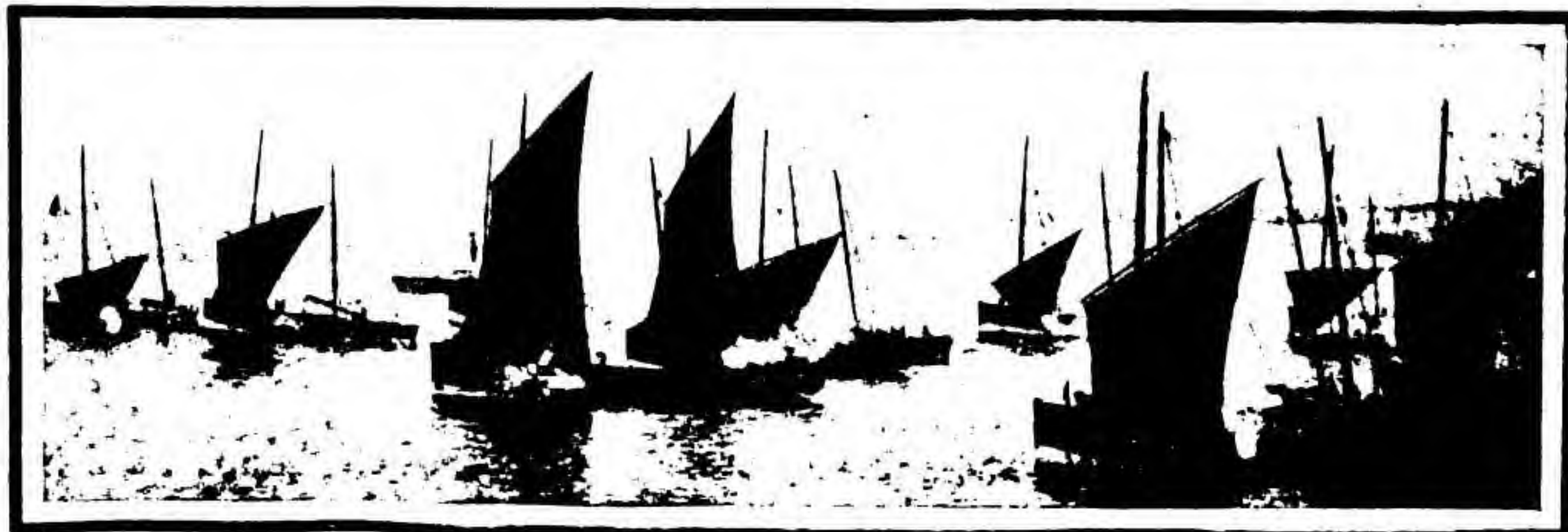
"No need to shoot. The poor beggar's dead—been run over by a motor-car, I should say. It's a lucky accident."

"I wonder?" said Richard.

"Wonder what?"

"Wonder if it was really an accident?"

BARRY PAIN.



Reid



THE VISITOR

A COMPLETE SHORT CHRISTMAS STORY

By OWEN OLIVER

Illustrated by Steven Spurrier



THE lights of Halsham Junction blinked at me through the snowstorm as I walked along Station Alley on Christmas Eve. I saw the down light change from red to green, and knew that the last train was "on." I heard the engine snort as it started from Halstead Town, and it puffed loudly as it struggled up the incline. I was close to the station before the bright cars overtook me, and turned the passage into a dazzle of white. I had only to run fifty yards to catch the train, but I did not run. The four-mile tramp across the snow appealed to me more than my own fireside.

I think my decision was only semi-conscious; but, when I had passed the station, a voice within accused me, as if one part of myself spoke to another: "You lost the train deliberately." The other

part answered sharply, like a man who is confronted unexpectedly with an unpleasant fact: "Yes, I know."

I had been married a little over three years, and in those years life had changed gradually from an affair of two to an affair of one. I had realised this for a long while, but I had refused to set it out plainly in my mind before. Now that I had done so, the change seemed to demand explanation. I accepted the alienation between Margaret and myself as established beyond alteration and past regret, but I puzzled how it had come about; puzzled till I left the outskirts of the town and came into the open road. Then the great white world invaded my mind and crowded my little affairs out.

The snowstorm had stopped suddenly, and the black sky had cleared. The full moon had come out above the white hills, to ride over the white fields, and the little, blinking stars were watching her

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ride. The frost was creeping upon the earth like an unseen army of pigmies with tiny, nipping fingers. The white carpet had crispened under my feet. Crish—crish—crish! The snow and the moon-shine made a fairy phantasy of everything. The fleecy bushes seemed turned into flocks of sheep, and the white-robed trees into shepherds who guarded them. "While shepherds watched their flocks by night," I hummed the carol that I learnt at my mother's knee, and my memory passed on to other tales of Christmastide that I learnt there. The gabled house on the knoll might be the home of Santa Claus. The queer-shaped cloud between his house and the moon might be the chariot waiting to carry him through the air, to drop his gifts down the chimneys of good little girls and boys. The tall, be-snowed countryman who strode down the lane, which slanted to the main road, might be Santa Claus himself. He carried a great sack over his shoulder, just as the good saint might have done. It was the hour when every year he walked abroad. I played with the fancy a while. When the heart is empty we fill it with creatures of the brain.

Our ways joined at the signpost. He slowed his steps a little, as if he waited for me. I took a good look at him in the moonlight, and was glad that closer inspection did not dispel my illusion. He seemed somewhat young for the kindly Visitor—for I thought that snow rather than age whitened his long hair and beard—but he was sufficiently like the picture of my imagination to satisfy me; a more saintly Santa Claus than my childish pictures, but still Santa Claus. He had a noble face, peaceful and wondrously kind.

"Good-evening, Santa Claus," I greeted him, hoping that he would enter into my fancy.

"A happy Christmas, friend!" he answered.

His voice was singularly pleasing, deep and full, and yet sweet, and, like his face, marvellously kind. I knew at once that he was no ordinary countryman.

"You are a stranger here, sir," I suggested.

"Not quite a stranger," he answered. "A visitor."

"Of course," I agreed. "The Christmas Visitor."

"I come every year, at Christmas,"

he said; and smiled. Evidently he was quite disposed to humour my jest.

"With your bag of gifts," I said. And I, too, smiled.

"With my bag of gifts," he assented.

"For the good little boys and girls; and perhaps for the naughty little boys and girls, too, if they have promised to be better."

"For all my little children," he said, "and sometimes for children who have grown bigger."

"Then there might be one for me!" I laughed.

"There may be one for you," he told me. He smiled again, and I smiled again.

"The fancy is in keeping with the night," I remarked. "You must not spoil my illusion."

"Illusions are better than the truth sometimes," he remarked, "and truer."

"Then you should carry some in your bag," I told him.

"My bag is full of illusions," he replied.

"Hush!" I implored. "Let me believe it is full of toys—for Santa Claus's children."

"Was there ever a toy without an illusion?" he asked. "Does any child find a wooden horse or a waxen doll on Christmas morning? The boy mounts a prancing steed, and rides off, through fairyland, to kill the giant and slay the dragon and rescue the beautiful princess. The girl finds a sleeping princess; and when she kisses her, for the prince, and picks her up, the princess opens her eyes and lives. You say it is a leaden ball at the end of a wire that wakes her. The child says it is the kiss of love. Which explanation is best?"

"Explanations have to follow facts, unfortunately," I protested.

"In the great things of life," he stated gravely, "the facts have to follow the creations of the mind, which you call illusions. It is the illusion of love which wakes the princess."

"And hard fact which changes the illusions," I commented; "including the princess!" I sighed.

"Ah!" he said gently, "is that your trouble, friend? You have lost the illusions which made a fair princess? And now you see just a waxen doll?"

"No," I denied. "No. She is a very beautiful lady—she who was my princess."



"You expected to live in love and concord," said the Stranger, "and in plain fact you quarrel."

"Scarcely that," I dissented. "We have had no bitter quarrel. Sometimes I have thought it would be better with us if we had!"

"But you find her ungracious? Or dull?"

"Her grace remains," I asserted, "although—she is not ungracious, even to me. She is certainly not dull."

"Is it greatness of mind that she lacks—the illusion gone?"

I shook my head.

"My—the lady whom I called my princess is not petty-minded or small," I declared. "She bears herself very nobly."

"But the soul that you saw in her? Is it that which you see no more? Or"—he looked at me keenly—"is it virtue that you miss?"

"Sir," I said haughtily, "the lady is my wife; and I can leave my honour in her hands. She is a high-souled woman, and there is no virtue that she misses."

The stranger looked at me again.

"There would seem to have been little need of illusion," he commented, with a touch of severity. "What fault do you find with this excellent lady, now that your illusion has passed?"

"I find no fault with her," I told him. "You cannot blame the doll—but she is no doll—that the child grows older, and the illusion is gone."

"But I can blame the princess," he retorted, "and the prince. I gather that the illusion was about your relations to each other. You expected to live in love and concord; and in plain fact you quarrel."

"Scarcely that," I dissented. "We have had no bitter quarrel. Sometimes I have thought it would be better with us if we had! We—it is as if fate——"

He held up his hand.

"You are part of fate," he told me. "You and she. Remember that."

"As if we," I substituted, "had mixed two unlike elements and stirred them into one; and when the stirring stopped they slowly separated."

"And who," he asked, "stopped the stirring?"

I did not answer. He shifted the bag from one shoulder to the other. I offered to relieve him for a while, but he shook his head.

"We all have our own burdens to carry," he said, "and the burdens of others. I carry the burdens of many. Friend, let me ease you of some of yours. I will take up your parable of the elements that

mingled together only so long as emotion stirred. It was love which stirred you and your princess, was it not?"

"We called it so," I replied. "It seemed that this was our illusion. I suppose, nowadays, love is."

"Love is the greatest of illusions," he told me, "and nearest to the truth."

"What is truth?" I demanded.

"I have been asked that before," he replied; "and I have not answered. For no man can understand. But this I can tell you: that illusions make truth."

"Your parable is too hard for me," I confessed.

"I will make it easy," he promised.

"Consider. A man dreams things which are not. If he only dreamed they would be only illusions, but he goes out into the world and fashions it to his ideas. The dreams of yesterday are the facts of to-day. So the poet sings of great deeds which never were, but his songs stir hearts to the deeds. It was the prince's kiss that made a sleeping woman a waking princess. Do you not understand?"

"Ah!" I said sadly, "they were a prince and princess; and we are a man and a woman—but she lacks little of the princess—in a world that kills romance. She is not—I cannot criticise my wife to you, sir."

He laid his hand on my shoulder.

"I bear the burdens of many," he said once more. "Speak of yourself. There is no fear that you will speak ill of your princess."

His touch seemed to win my confidence, and my heart was full to speech; and I spoke.

"I will tell you of a man and a princess," I said. "There was no unforgivable deed between them; no ill deed at all; no ill-will, I think. The man has none. God forbid that he should! They were sensible, worldly, unsentimental people."

"The princess was the less sentimental, perhaps."

"Perhaps. She had great dignity and self-respect. I—the man would not wish her different. Anyhow, they could not help seeing the childishness of—of their illusion. They laughed away the romance, I think; and then there was nothing left to bind them. They were totally unlike. So they went their unlike ways. It is a separation of mind, and—and domestic

life—that I mean. There is no open breach. There will not be. It isn't that they have altered. He is no less a prince than he was — Well, he wasn't. She was a princess; and she is. They are the same as they were. It is only the illusion—what they called love—which is lost. I have known for some time, but I wouldn't face it till to-night."

"I think," the stranger remarked, "that the man was much more romantic than the princess. Perhaps that is part of the unlikeness?"

"Perhaps," I agreed. "Yes. I think the man was only superficially matter-of-fact. But he had more to stir romance. The princess was—is—so very beautiful. Anyhow, his illusion has gone; and nothing can bring it back."

"Are you sure that it *has* gone?" he asked. "Suppose some great danger threatened your princess? The fiery dragon of death—or life? It is the same dragon. Would you not stand between?"

"Of course," I said.

"And if it threatened you? Would not she——"

"Of course," I said again. "But we haven't to fight dragons."

"Ah, you do not see them! Suppose she were ill? Hurt? In bitter trouble? Friend, your face answers me. The illusion has not gone. It only sleeps. Will you wait for it to be wakened by sorrow, or sickness, or death?"

I was silent for a time.

"I think," I said, at last, "there is nothing less can wake our romance. There are harder things to overcome than giants and dragons. Indifference; ridicule. You are very wise, sir, and you know that love is a double illusion. Perhaps I could wake half. I admire my princess so much. But the other half—— If I went home and kissed my—my princess, I can see her raise her eyebrows and shrug herself. 'My lord is pleased to be merry to-night!' I can hear her say it."

"And suppose you told her that you were not merry, but sad at the separation between you? You are sadder than you know, I think."

"Perhaps," I murmured. "Perhaps."

"Suppose you said: 'We loved each other very sweetly once, princess. Shall we try again?' Are you sure that your princess would not re-awaken?"

"Tolerably sure," I declared bitterly. "To come down to the level of everyday, my princess would probably suggest that my friends had treated me too kindly to-night, toss her head, and walk off to her room. I can see her turn at the door, and suggest that: 'Really, we are old enough to behave like rational beings.'"

"That seems to be your common illusion," the stranger told me. "You are more than rational beings. God, Who gave you minds, gave you hearts."

"It may be an illusion," I answered, "but the dragon of the commonplace—the *drag* of the everyday upon our minds and hearts—is the greatest illusion in the world, I think. It will take a bigger sword than you bring in your bag to kill it."

He put his hand on my shoulder again, and this time his touch made me cold with fear.

"How do you know," he asked sternly, "what I may bring? How do you know what any year, any day, any hour, may bring to one of you?"

He looked in my eyes, and his shone like seas of light. The snowy landscape glowed with a strange radiance. I thought that the Visitor was more than earthly. If this was an illusion, it mastered me, and I cried out to him.

"If you bring sorrow," I begged, "bring it to me, not to her!"

His eyes softened, and his touch grew gentle.

"I bring you memories," he said; and the strange light faded, and the Visitor was gone. I hardly missed him for a moment, for my whole mind was full of memory—memory so vivid that I seemed to live the past again.

I stood opposite Delse village, remembering. Margaret and I had passed there this very night three years ago. The sound of carols came to us from the village, as it came to me now. It was a dark, wet night, and slushy underfoot. We had walked through a drenching rain, and she paused, and took off her cap to wring it. I pressed her mass of glorious black hair between my hands, and squeezed out the water. She laughed, with her head hanging back, and her beautiful face turned upward. And I bent and kissed her wet cheek with sudden passion.

"You silly!" she cried; and her eyes still laughed. "I'm *dripping*! Let me go!"

But I held her fast.

"Haven't you an atom of romance, Margie?" I asked. I used to call her that sometimes, but no small pet-name could endure for queenly Margaret.

"Only—" she looked at me, and laughed again—"only Christmas," she said, with a teasing way that was unusual to her.

"I have another," I said. "You!"

"Have you? Well, I'll give you a kiss if you'll pull your poor, cold romance along. There! Now run!"

We ran for a little way. When we reverted to a walk, Margaret turned to me, and spoke of romance—the only time ever!

"You have run your romance warm," she said gaily. "I suppose that is why—I am a very unsentimental person, Jack, as you suggest. My romances are atomic. Such as they are, I recognise three: Christmas, me-to-you, you-to-me. They don't bear too much handling. Romances are—oh, like silky cobwebs that rough hands mustn't touch. No! Gas-mantles after they've been flared!" She laughed quickly. She always ridiculed sentiment like that. "We'll put my cobwebs by till next Christmas, but—I'm going to surprise you."

She turned to me, put her arms round my neck, and deliberately kissed me. It was the only time she had ever done so unasked, and never since.

"Now, for goodness' sake don't talk about it," she implored. "It just won't bear talk. I feel a big fool. We'll run again."

We ran, and I never spoke to her again of her unsolicited kiss. *That*, I thought now, was how the stirring stopped. I ran my romance—my beautiful, beautiful romance!—warm, and then I let her cool. I would go home and tell her that, of all the good moments in my life, the moment when she kissed me unasked was the best. Yes; I would do it; but I pictured her dignified face looking contemptuous, and trying, with that courtesy which was so characteristic of her, to veil the contempt.

"My dear Jack," she would say, "I am sufficiently ashamed of myself. You needn't remind me of my—my childishness. We were very young, and—we are talking nonsense." She would pretend to cover a

yawn. "I wish you a happy Christmas, and the success which you deserve in the New Year. Good-night!"

Yes; Margaret's cold dignity would hold me off. I knew her better than—than the Visitor of whom I had dreamed. It must be a dream. Margaret would curl her lip at my attempt at romance. *But I would kiss her first.* Two of the romances were dead, but "she-to-me" had opened its eyes again. I would kiss Margaret before I said a word.

I turned my face homeward again, walking fast.

"It is so hopeless," I muttered. "I could love my princess again, but she will not move a step to meet me."

I rounded the corner, by the big oak, as I said that, and I saw Margaret walking toward me along the road. She would know I must walk that way if I missed the train.

Her face—I saw it in the bright moonlight—was dignified and grave, as always. There was no expression that I could read. Her bearing was even statelier than usual. Her brothers called her Queen Margaret.

"I wanted a walk," she explained, in her calm, measured tones, as we met.

I said nothing, but laid my hands firmly on her shoulders. I expected a little cry, half indignant and half astonished, but she made no sound. When I bent to kiss her, she did not resist, but the huge hat she wore came between us. She lifted one gloved hand and took the hat off. I bent and kissed her. She did not struggle, though I held her for a long time, did not move at all. Her face was still and her eyes were fathomless.

"You gave me a kiss once that I remember," I said. "I thought, perhaps—"

"Perhaps I shall," she said quietly, "but not yet. I want to say something. Shall we walk on now?"

"May I kiss you again?"

"Yes."

I kissed her lips, and they returned the kiss faintly. I offered my arm, and she took it, and we walked on.

"I was sitting over the fire," she said in her still, rich voice, "after the last train was in. I knew you must be walking home, as we walked three years ago. I was thinking of that. I suppose I fell asleep, but I thought I was awake. There



I laid my hands firmly on her shoulders. I expected a little cry, half indignant and half astonished, but she made no sound.

was a knock at the front door. I had sent the servants to bed, so I went and opened it. This part is a dream, of course, but I will tell it as if I was awake. Do not laugh."

"Dear," I promised, "I will not laugh."

"A man stood outside. He carried a great sack. His face was—I thought he was the—the Christmas Visitor."

Her voice trembled.

"I think," I said huskily, "he was that. I, too, have dreamed."

"He said: 'I bring you a happy Christmas, friend;' and I said: 'You cannot bring me that.' He smiled, and laid his hand on my arm. 'There is one coming along the road who can,' he told me. 'Come!' My hat and coat were on the chair in the hall. I had left them there to take upstairs. I put them on and went with him." She paused.

"Yes," I said. "Yes?"

"It was a dream, of course, but I do not know when I woke out of it. We walked this way—the way that you would come. He spoke of the coolness that had come between me and—and the man who, in his heart, regarded me as a princess——"

"Oh, Margaret," I cried, "I do!"

"The man whom, in my heart, I loved."

"And you do?"

"And I do. No, dear; do not kiss me yet. You shall. It was only that our hearts were hidden away, he said, especially mine. 'He would not love you more if you wore it on the surface,' he told me; 'it would be enough if he knew it is there.' He warned me not to hide it until it was discovered by sickness or sorrow or death.

Jack, I am a proud woman, and I am very ashamed—not really ashamed—shame-faced over my—my love!" She gave a quick cry. "I cannot talk of—of these things often. I did not think that I could even to-night, but you made it possible when we met. Three

years ago I uncovered my heart, and now——"

She stopped, put her arms round me, kissed me once—twice—three times.

"That is for three years" she told me, flushing, and putting on her hat. She was never so regally beautiful before.

"You don't mean that you won't kiss me again till next Christmas Eve, Margaret?"

"I will kiss you back whenever you kiss me—but you mustn't too often—and perhaps I will kiss you sometimes, if you ask. *Please*, only sometimes. But not unasked. You understand me quite well, Jack; and you must take me as I am. Now, we can't talk of ordinary things, and we mustn't handle romance. Some romances are—are shy. Mine is. Let's be very quiet, Jack."

I gave her my arm, and we walked in silence to our door, opened it, and went in; but before we closed it I looked out.

"I do not see our Visitor," I said; and the thought of Him made my voice hushed and awed.

Margaret turned back, and stood beside me at the door. She put her arm through mine.

"He came to you, too?" she asked.

"To me, too," I said. And standing there in the moonlight, facing the white fairyland below, and the heavens above, I told her what passed, as I have set it down here. My voice was low. I held her hand, and her head leaned against mine.

"He said that illusions were nearest the truth," I concluded; "and perhaps this is." I looked up and down the road, and across the snowy fields. And presently I looked above.

"Our Visitor is gone," I said.

"No, dear," Margaret whispered. "He has come to stay with us—all the year and every year. Our lives shall show—and our love."

She put her arm round my neck, again unasked, and kissed me. Her face was wet with tears.



Sandringham Church, Norfolk, where the King and Queen attend divine service on Christmas Day.

BLACK MAGIC

A TALE OF THE MYSTERIES OF THE EAST

BY

JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Illustrated by Steven Spurrier

THE sound of wild lamentation came from the jungle path that crept like a russet-coloured snake through the green tree masses, and Ford rose from his chair and stared down the narrow trail. Louder and louder grew the peculiar wailing noise, and the American wondered as he listened.

"Who the dickens is making that row?" he muttered. "Hey, Hochdorf," he cried, turning to the door of the bungalow, "come out here and listen to the funeral coming up the trail. Someone is coming up the path, and weeping like a regiment of motherless kids!"

The shrill chant of pain and sorrow increased in volume, and round a bend in the narrow trail stumbled a nude Dyak, who shuffled towards the bungalow. Ford frowned and watched the approaching native narrowly. There was something strangely repellent about the Dyak, and the American gave a grunt of astonishment as he realised what that something was. The naked Dyak was a leper!

The leper stumbled forward till he was opposite Hochdorf's bungalow, then he halted. Slowly, and with much care, he drew a circle in the red dust of the track; then, stepping within the circle and turning his face to the bungalow, he started to pour forth a perfect torrent of words. As he spoke he rocked himself backwards and forwards, and as the movement of his body increased, so did the volume of words, till the American, watching the lean head thrust forward, made a mental comparison of the straining head to a small nozzle that

was unable to let the tremendous flow escape.

Hochdorf, the German naturalist, roused from his siesta by Ford's shout, strolled out upon the verandah, and the American looked at him questioningly.

"What the devil is wrong with him?" asked Ford. "What is he saying?"

"He is cursing Gung," said the German quietly. "Every time that the new moon shows like the paring of a golden fingernail, he comes up here and curses Gung. He curses him good and plenty. Once I did not like it, but now I have grown used to it."

"And what does Gung think?"

Hochdorf lifted a stubby forefinger and pointed to the end of the verandah. The lean face of Gung, the Hindu, was thrust around the corner of the bungalow. He was staring at the leper on the dusty track, and at regular intervals he lifted his skinny hands and brushed his bare shoulders vigorously.

Ford watched the performance with astonishment.

For five minutes the Dyak did not pause, then he stopped suddenly, stared with blazing eyes at Gung, stepped nervously out of the circle, and hobbled off in the direction of the village by the river. Gung gave his shoulders a final brush, and retired to the rear of the bungalow. The performance was over.

Ford looked at Hochdorf, and the German read the question in the eyes of the American.

"I have never told you the story connected with this business," said the

naturalist. "Perhaps I was afraid to tell it to you. I might have thought that you would not believe, and I would have been annoyed. Ja! I would be much annoyed. When you have seen a thing like that you have just seen, and when you hear the reason for it, you should believe much, my friend. Sit down and I will tell you why Jilo the leper comes up here every time that the moon is little, and curses Gung.

"This business that concerns Jilo the leper happened about five years ago. The Dyaks told me that there was a white man living on the top of Mount Devil-face, that hill that you see to the right, but I did not believe that story. One day I saw that man that the Dyaks spoke of, and he was white. He was bathing in a little pool at the foot of the cliff, and I watched him from the bushes. He was young and good-looking, and after a while I stepped from behind the bushes and called out to him. I said 'Good-day,' and he started like a wild boar that has been grabbed by a tiger. Gott! didn't he jump! He rushed to the bank, picked up his clothes, and ran like a madman into the underbrush.

" 'He is a crazy man,' I said to myself, and I went on about my business. If he wanted to sit up on that hill and amuse himself with his own company, it was no business of mine. I had to trap monkeys and things.

"But Fate was bent on making me meet that man. Eight days after that morning, Gung fell into the river above the cataract. Gung has only one good arm, and it looked bad for him. The water whirled him round and round as if he was a straw, and I was that stunned that I could not move. Then I saw the hermit from Mount Devil-face. He sprang into the water, swam to the spot where the Hindu was going round and round like a squirrel in a cage, took a grip of Gung's hair, and dragged him to the bank. But the moment he got Gung safe to land, he beat it for what you call the tall timber.

"Ja! He was out of sight in an instant, and I had to go to work to empty Gung of a few gallons of river water.

"When I got that Hindu so that he was able to sit up, he looked at me and spluttered out a question.

" 'Which way did he go, master?' he asked.

" 'He went into the trees,' I said, pointing with my hand.

" 'Then I must follow him and thank him, master,' said Gung. 'He frightened the Black Angel away, and I must give him my blessing.'

"I could not get that fool notion out of that Hindu's head, so I went with him in the direction that the man had gone. And it was a mighty rough track. We climbed half-way up the face of that hill, and then we came to a stop. We came to a stop because it would have been dangerous to go on. Right in front of us was a big stone boulder, and the muzzle of a Winchester peeped over that stone.

" 'Don't come any farther,' said a voice from the other side of the rock. 'If you do you will get hurt.'

" 'We do not mean any harm,' I said. 'My name is Hochdorf, and I am a naturalist. And this is the Hindu that you dragged from the river. He wishes to thank you for saving his life.'

" 'He can thank me and go back,' said the voice. 'I do not want anyone near the place where I live.'

"I opened my mouth to say something, then I shut it again. It is a fool's business to lose one's temper. Then Gung poured out his thanks to the man behind the boulder, and after he had exhausted himself we turned to go down the hill.

"We had got about twenty paces from that stone when the man called me by name.

" 'Hochdorf,' he said, 'I am sorry for speaking to you like that. I do not mean any offence, but I cannot mix with anyone.'

" 'You know best,' I said. 'I am not offended. I bid you good-morning.'

" 'One moment,' he cried. 'I must tell you why I do not want your company. I am a leper!'

" 'Gott!' I cried; 'this is not a nice place for you to be living by yourself.'

" 'It is all right,' he said. 'I picked it. Do not worry about me. I told you that because I did not like you to think that I was an unmannerly brute.'

" 'Can I do anything for you?' I asked.

" 'Nothing,' he answered. 'Good-bye, Hochdorf. Good-bye, Gung.'

"He slipped away up the side of the mountain as I stood there wondering over what he said, then Gung and I climbed down that hill and came back here. Gung

was mighty silent, and I was not inclined to chatter just then. Not much. I was thinking of that poor devil who was suffering a living death on the top of that hill. Ach! I felt sick every time I thought of the words that he had said. 'I am a leper!' he cried, and there was something in those four words that bit into my soul like an acid.

"That night I sat out on the end of the verandah and stared up at that hill. That big peak stood up like a great pyramid, and as I sat and smoked and thought of that man, I wondered what he would be

three times. I was right! The moment I stopped signalling there was a little burst of flame on the very point of the hill, and it was lifted and lowered three times.

" 'He has answered, master,' said a voice in the clearing; and then I knew that Gung had been watching that hill, too.

" 'I am saying good-night to him,' I muttered. 'It is lonely up there.'

"Gung stepped out of the clearing and stood at my side. 'May I say good-night to him, master?' he asked; and I turned him over the lamp without speaking.



The leper drew a circle in the red dust of the track; then, stepping within the circle and turning his face to the bungalow, he started to pour forth a perfect torrent of words. As he spoke he rocked himself backwards and forwards, and as the movement of his body increased, so did the volume of words.

thinking of up there in the darkness. I could not see a light.

" 'I wish I had never seen him,' I said. 'It will drive me crazy to sit here and think of what he is suffering.'

"After a while I got a curious idea into my head. I thought that the man on the hill was watching me. Mind you, there was no light, but I had a notion that he was sitting there in the darkness watching the light that was in the bungalow. I felt certain that he was. I got up from my chair and brought the lamp from the room, and I lifted and lowered that lamp

"Gung lifted and lowered the lamp three times, and the man on the hill answered. I quenched that lamp mighty quick when the Hindu put it down. I felt inclined to cry, and I did not want Gung to see an old German naturalist make a fool of himself.

"For seven weeks Gung and I signalled 'Good-night' to that man, and for seven weeks he answered us. Then one night he did not answer. For one hour Gung and I stood there and waved the lamp, but we got no signal. And he did not answer on the next night. I lifted and lowered the

lamp till my arms ached, but that hill was as dark as the rock tombs of Perna.

"We tried again on the next night, but it was just the same. There was not a spark of light on that hill, and I was puzzled. Gung was puzzled, too. He thought something had happened to that man, and he squatted there in the darkness for hours after I had told him to go to bed.

"He has left the place most likely," I said. "Do not worry your head about the business."

"No; he has not left, master," said the Hindu. "I feel that he is still up on that hill."

"I have told you that Gung has a remarkable skin, have I not? He pulls his information out of the air, and that remark of his kept me awake that night. Ja! I lay awake thinking of that poor devil, and when the dawn came up I called Gung, and we started to look for that man.

"It was late in the afternoon when we found that man's camp. And Gung's skin had told him the truth. You bet it had. That man was there; at least, there was a little part of him there. He had wasted down to a skeleton with fever, and when we entered that hut he was lying on a mat and babbling of persons and places that were a long distance from his little hell.

"You can guess how I felt at that minute. I cursed myself because I was helpless. That man was near death, and all I could do did not amount to three pfennigs. It is the devil to be sick in an outlandish place like this.

"He is sick to death," said Gung. "The fever has tied itself around him like a tree-snake ties itself round a little bird."

"And that Hindu was right. The fever had that man by the throat, and it was choking the life out of him. All that afternoon Gung and I sat and watched him toss from side to side, and I cursed the wild places of the world as I sat there. Do you know why, my friend? He called for someone by name all through that long afternoon, and those cries hurt me. Ja! it was a woman. He called for her like a broken-hearted wood-pigeon calling for its mate, and his cries stabbed us. There was no light in his eyes, yet he looked at Gung and me when he called her name as if he thought that we could go and fetch her to him. And she was some distance from that spot. When he called her name he cried out her

address, and the world never seemed bigger to me than it did then. That girl was living on the Goodwin Road at Rangoon, and Rangoon is fourteen hundred miles from this place.

"If he cannot sleep he will die," said Gung. "He is killing himself by tossing from side to side."

"I cannot stop him from doing it!" I snapped.

"We might," said that Hindu.

"We might what, fool?" I cried. "What are you talking about?"

"He wants her," said Gung. "He wants her badly. Do you think that she loves him still?"

"How do I know, you idiot?" I roared. "Why do you ask?"

"Because if she loves him still, and is as anxious to see him as he is to see her, something might be done," said that Hindu softly.

"Now, I have told you before of Gung. I have told you of the things that he could do, but I did not like him to attempt any funny business with a man who was to close to death. Nein! I did not. It is not good to play fool tricks when the lieber Gott is working His will in matters of that kind.

"I will not touch him," said Gung, when I glared at him. "I will not do anything to change his condition, master."

"You are a fool to meddle with things that are beyond our ken," I cried.

"That Hindu looked at me and looked at the man on the bed who was still crying for the girl on the Goodwin Road at Rangoon. 'He saved my life, master,' he muttered. 'And if that girl was asleep—— Do you think she is asleep?'

"I did not know what to say when he asked me that question. I wanted to do something for that man on the mat, but I was afraid. I was gripped by a fear that seemed to have been buried in the back of my head for twenty thousand years.

"It is after midnight," I answered. "and I should think that she would be asleep."

"Gung did not say a word when I told him that. He picked up an empty gourd, and filled it with water; then he picked the darkest corner of that hut, squatted down upon his haunches, and started to stare into that gourd of water. Ja! He sat and stared at that water like a snake staring at a

humming-bird. His face was only about eighteen inches from the top of the vessel, and you would think by the way he looked into that gourd that the water in it was a thousand leagues deep!

"Did you ever feel a little silence in the jungle—a little silence like as if everything in the wide world was waiting for something to happen? Well, I seemed to feel such a silence. There seemed to be no sound in the world, nothing but the cries of pain that came from the sick man on the mat, and those cries seemed to be going out into the world like threads of agony.

"I had an idea that you could hear those cries of that sick man a hundred miles away. And as that silence seemed to go farther and farther into the night, I thought that you could hear him at Singapore, at Bangkok, and at—— Do you think you could guess the place that I am going to name? *My friend, I thought that you could hear those cries at Rangoon!*

"Do you think I am mad? You do not? I am pleased to know that. I tell you that I thought those cries could be heard in Rangoon, and the girl that the man was calling for lived in Rangoon. Himmel, yes! I grew cold when I thought that. Something, I know not what, chilled my flesh. That silence made me feel as if I was in a tremendous glass jar that had no air inside it. Then I tried to cry out to Gung to make him stop staring into that gourd, but as I opened my mouth something happened.

"My friend, the door of that little hut opened ever so slightly, and I got a feeling that was not a nice feeling. Mein Gott! No! I felt that someone had entered that little place, someone that I could not see!

"I felt that the presence that had come into that hut was approaching the mat on which the sick man was lying. Felt it, I tell you! I could see nothing, but my skin was telling me with ten thousand tongues. You have sensed a person in a dark room, have you not? Well, if you could multiply that feeling a million times you would understand what I felt. And I was not the only one that felt things.

"That man had brought a kitten with him up to the top of that mountain, and when the door opened that kitten sprang up, arched her back, and stood with her green eyes fixed on the spot where my skin told me that invisible presence was standing.

I am wrong about that kitten when I say that she felt something. She *saw* something. Ja! I am sure of that! As my skin told me that the presence was moving towards the mat, the kitten followed it with her eyes. And that infernal idiot of a Hindu was still staring into that gourd as if he saw the crown of Tamerlane on the bottom of the thing!

"The sick man was still moaning and crying for the girl in Rangoon; but just as I felt that the presence was alongside the mat, he stopped suddenly. He stopped with her name on his lips, and, with a little cry of joy, he lifted his right hand and groped around in the air as if he was feeling for something. I am telling you just what I saw, my friend. He groped with his right hand as if he was searching for fingers that were stroking his forehead.

"He put down his right hand and felt the air with his left, and he gave a little sigh of wonder when he could find nothing. He became wonderfully quiet then. Wonderfully quiet. He shut his eyes and folded his hands, and I stood and watched him in a stillness that I will never feel again in my life. I watched with my mouth open, and my neck pushed forward like a red-legged crane that is waiting for a mud-fish to come out of his hole. And presently I saw that a miracle had happened. Ja, a miracle! That poor devil had gone to sleep with a smile on his thin face!

"*'Gott!'* I said to myself. *'This is black magic!'* That's what I thought. And just then I seemed to feel that the presence that I sensed was in that room was leaving it. And that kitten knew just what I knew. The cat's eyes followed that something to the door, the door opened a little, then it closed again, and I drew a big breath. I had been afraid to breathe while that was in the room. That is a fact.

"For three minutes after that presence left the room, Gung continued to stare into that gourd of water, then he lifted his head, gave a little moan, and toppled over on the floor. And as he rolled over on the floor of that hut, the silence that was hedging us in seemed to crack up as if the noises rushed upon it from every point of the compass.

"I brought Gung to his senses, and I looked him in the eyes. And he looked back at me like a man who is not afraid of

what he has done. He knew that the man on the mat was asleep. The steady breathing of that poor devil was a bit more soothing to our nerves than those cries of pain that we had listened to before Gung had done that stunt.

" 'He would have died, master,' gasped the Hindu. 'If the Black Angel had kept his eyes open another six hours, he would have died. I had to do it. He saved my life at the cataract.'

"What could I say to that, my friend? Nothing. Not one single thing. I sat there till daybreak thinking of that business and watching the man on the mat. That kitten was still watching the door. It did not know that Gung was responsible for that queer happening in the night, and it thought that presence might come back at any minute.

"It was daylight when that man awoke, and then he looked at me with sane eyes. That sleep had anchored his mind a little. Just a little. He watched me, and he watched Gung, but he watched Gung the most. Ja! That Hindu sat there on the floor, and they looked at each other in silence.

" 'This is Gung,' I said. 'You saved his life at the Weeping Falls.'

"He nodded his head and put out his thin hand to Gung, and that Hindu crawled across the floor and put the hand of the sick man on his head. And the man on the mat whispered something in Hindustanee, and Gung answered.

"For part of that day the sick man seemed to be better, but when the evening came along he became delirious, and he began to cry again for that girl in Rangoon. Ach! I do not want to listen to anyone cry for a person as that man cried.

"Gung looked at me when it came midnight; then without a word he got that gourd of water and started on that business again. I felt more sick than ever on that second night. I had been thinking all day about that happening, and when the silence started to well out from the hut I felt cold and clammy. I am telling you the truth of this business. I know that some spectacled scientists in Berlin and New York would laugh at this yarn, but there are things happening in this part of the world that those same scientists could not reason out in a million years.

"That same silence crept out into the

night when the Hindu started to stare into the water. I thought that the whole world was silent, and those cries of the man on the mat were going out, out, out through the stillness, seeking the one he desired.

"I stood back near the wall of that hut and watched I watched the door. Ja! And as I watched, the same thing happened that had happened on the night previous. The door opened ever so slightly, and I got gooseflesh all over me. And that kitten looked as if she was startled, too. She arched her back and watched with her green eyes, and I knew that the presence was approaching the mat in just the same way that it had approached it once before.

"That man stopped crying out the girl's name, and he lay quiet. But he did not lie quiet for long. Nein! He lifted himself on his elbow and tried to get up, but he was too weak. Ten times—twenty times he tried to get up, but each time he would fall back upon the mat, and I was so scared that I did not step forward to stop him from wasting his strength. I did not. As I watched that man I thought that someone that I could not see was motioning him to follow to the door, so I stood as if I was rooted to the spot.

"That went on for about fifteen minutes, and I got afraid. I glanced at the squatting Hindu, and wondered how the strain of that business would affect him. I did not know what might happen. I knew that the presence was still in the hut, and I got a queer feeling that something terrible would happen if Gung stopped staring at that gourd before that thing left the little dwelling. And I did not think that the harm would come to the sick man. No, I did not.

"After what seemed a century, that sick man fell back exhausted, and I felt that the thing that the kitten saw was moving towards the door. And I was right. The door opened slowly, and remained open, and then the man on the bed commenced to struggle again in an effort to get upon his feet. Do you know what I was certain of just then? I was certain that the sick man saw someone beckoning to him from that door. I will swear he did. His struggles to get to his feet were terrible to look at, but it was no use. He fell back in a faint on the mat, the door closed softly, and that silence was broken again by the noises of the jungle.



"Jllo stepped on those patterns that Gung had traced in the dust, and the moment he stepped on them he stopped. He stopped as if something had bitten him on the bare leg, and he looked down at those little drawings. He looked at them for about a minute, then he gave a wild yell and sprang forward."

"Gung was exhausted after that stunt. He was a long while coming to his senses, and when he could speak he put a question to me:

" 'What was the matter, master?' he asked. 'What made her wait?'

" 'What do I know?' I cried. 'I think that this man on the bed saw someone beckoning to him from the door.'

" 'She wants him,' said Gung. 'She wants him to come back.'

" 'But he is a leper,' I said. 'That is why he is in this outlandish spot.'

" 'We will think over that when he gets free of his fever,' said the Hindu. 'Perhaps he can shake off the curse that has been put upon his skin. She loves him, and he must go to her.'

" 'There must be no more of this game,' I said, pointing to the gourd of water. 'I will not have it. If he gets well, I shall be pleased, but I will not stop here and see this kind of thing go on.'

" 'Perhaps he will get well now,' said Gung. 'I think he will.'

"And that Hindu was right in his guess. The fever left that man on the following day, and he got stronger and stronger. Gung was his nurse, and there was never a better nurse than Gung. He would steal my supplies for that man, although I was willing to give anything that I had. He would carry things up and down that mountain at all hours of the day and night, and Kynaston—that was the man's name—he would thank him over and over again. But Gung did not want thanks. He was trying to repay Kynaston for saving his life, and he wanted to do the thing properly.

" 'If we could only send him back to her, master!' he said to me.

" 'If,' I said; and I looked up at the top of Mount Devil-face and thought of that poor devil who had an affliction put upon him.

" 'We might,' said Gung.

" 'I am doubtful,' I growled. 'This is not a day of miracles. I am wondering if it would not have been better for him to die when he was near death. There is no cure for the ailment that he suffers from.'

"Gung did not speak when I said that. He picked up the bundle of supplies that I had made up for Kynaston, and he started off for the mountain.

"Now I will tell you about Jilo the Leper, and how he came into this story. When Kynaston was in that little hut on

Mount Devil-face, Jilo was a hill robber. He was an out and out bad man. He was a devil. Once or twice I had been tempted to put a bullet through his skin to teach him a lesson, but I kept my temper and let him go on with his tricks. Mind you, it was not the same Jilo that you saw this afternoon that I am talking about. He was not a leper at that time. Nein! He was a big, strong man, with the heart of a tiger, and he did not shuffle along in the dust as you saw him shuffle just now. He would spring like a tiger on some poor devil of a native, and he would laugh as he beat him and robbed him of anything that he had. He was Jilo the Devil at that time, and a mighty lively devil he was.

"It was one morning about five weeks after the happenings in that hut on the mountain that I got another surprise from Gung. I was walking along a trail near the bottom of that hill, when that Hindu sprang from the bushes and gripped my arm.

" 'Do not move, master!' he cried. 'Do not move one step!'

" 'What is the matter with you, fool!' I roared. 'Leave my arm go!'

" 'But turn back!' he cried. 'Do not go on this path! It is not safe!'

"I thought that he had gone crazy, and I looked ahead of me to see if I could see anything. And I saw what was worrying that Hindu. In the dust of the track he had made some curious signs, and he did not like me to tramp over those little drawings of his. I laughed as I stood and looked at them.

" 'I will step over your little drawings,' I said. 'I will not hurt them.'

"Gung fell on his knees in front of me, and his face was the face of a man who is stricken with fear. His lean hands grabbed at my coat like a crazy man, and I could not get away from him when I struggled.

" 'Do not step over them!' he shrieked. 'Something terrible will happen to you if you do! Go back, master, and leave me alone!'

" 'But someone else will come this way,' I said. 'Will you keep them away?'

" 'There is only one person that I will not keep away, master,' said Gung.

" 'And who is that?' I asked.

"That Hindu was about to speak when he heard someone walking along the trail from the direction that I had come, and

he shut his mouth quick. He grabbed me by the arm and pulled me into the bushes, and when I looked through the screen of leaves I saw Jilo coming along the path. He was walking with his head in the air, and he had no eyes for Gung's little drawings. His bare feet kicked up the dust, and he was humming a little war-song to himself as he came along. I do not know why I did not call out to Jilo and stop him from walking over that place. Perhaps I did not think much of that mumbo-jumbo business of Gung's, and perhaps I did not love that hill robber enough to worry my head about his welfare. But I know that I did not make any move to stop him.

"Jilo stepped on those patterns that Gung had traced in the dust, and the moment he stepped on them he stopped. He stopped as if something had bitten him on the bare leg, and he looked down at those little drawings. He looked at them for about a minute, then he gave a wild yell and sprang forward. It was a devil of a yell. It woke the echoes of the jungle, and I stood listening to the shrieks that he fired into the quiet of that place as he raced away into the trees. Then I turned to Gung.

"What is the meaning of this business?" I asked. "What happened to Jilo when he stepped on those signs?"

"I do not know yet, master," he answered quietly. "Wait! I will destroy the words in the dust, and then you can pass on your way without fear."

"This is a strange story, my friend, but I am only telling you what I know to be the truth. Perhaps that business on the jungle path had nothing to do with what followed. I do not know. But Jilo and Gung think that the incident of that morning was a mighty important one. You bet they do! Five days after that curious little bit of work, the hermit of Mount Devil-face walked into this bungalow. At least, he did not walk into the bungalow, because I was sitting here when he came up the steps. He stood and looked at me for a minute without speaking, and in that minute I saw that there was a light in his eyes that was new. And it was a light of joy.

"Hochdorf," he said, "I am cured! The good God has answered my prayers, and I am a well man!"

"I could not speak for a moment. I

could not. I have never heard of a person being cured of leprosy suddenly. Yet that man looked as if something wonderful had happened to him.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"I am a doctor, Hochdorf," he answered. "I know that I am cured. I prayed to God, and He has performed a miracle. I am going down to the coast, and I will get a passage to Singapore. This is my address. I will write you the moment I reach the peninsula."

"He handed me a piece of paper with his address, and I read it. It was 'Goodwin Road, Rangoon.' And as I shook his hand I thought of those two nights in the hut on the mountain top.

"Now I come back to Jilo. Five days after Kynaston left this place, Jilo came up the track and cursed Gung. He cursed him as you saw him curse this afternoon, and when I tried to run the ugly devil away from the front of the bungalow he showed me some marks on his legs. And those marks made me keep clear of him. You bet they did. Jilo was a leper! And what do you think he said? He said that Gung had put that disease upon him on the morning that he had trodden on those patterns that the Hindu had drawn in the dust of the trail. That was a funny notion, was it not? But he believed it.

"He said that Gung had shifted the disease from the white man to him. Jilo, and he has the same notion to this day. I have not questioned Gung. It is not my business. But I know that Kynaston is a well man. Ja, I know that! I got a letter from him a few days ago, and I read it to Gung.

"Master," said that Hindu, "do not tell him that Jilo comes up here to curse me when the moon is small and golden. You have never told him that, have you?"

"I have not, Gung," I said, and I spoke the truth when I said that. It is a strange business, but it would do no good telling a story of this kind to Kynaston, who is married to a nice girl at Rangoon. Perhaps he never had that disease. Perhaps Jilo the Leper is a madman. And Gung might be a cunning fakir, for all I know. My head aches when I try to puzzle that business out. Listen to the black monkey weeping. Her little one died this morning, and she has been crying like a Kyan mourner ever since."



Nature Illustrations Co.

THE CHALK PIT

A COMPLETE STORY

BY

A. M. BURRAGE

Illustrated by G. C. Wilmshurst



It had ceased snowing, and the garden was a place of enchantment—lawns and paths a level, unsullied white, trees bending like old pilgrims beneath their unaccustomed burdens, the sun-dial swathed over and now a grotesque snowman, the whole a wonderful effect of black and white, with the frost here and there catching gleams from the windows of the house. It was a place for fairies to dance in.

Outside the drawing-room windows, on a covered balcony which the snow had not invaded, a man and a girl stood leaning over the railings, watching the scene. The light behind them threw their shadows far across the dazzling snow, and it was the girl's shadow which Hailwin watched, and marked each slight movement with a lover's eyes. The silence, which had seemed pleasant for a time, began to torment him, for he had much to say, and no great command of words. When at last he broke the silence, there was a strange quality of awkwardness in his voice.

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"Well, it's been a jolly time," he said, without looking at her. "I wish it was true that to-morrow never comes."

"You must come down again soon," said the girl. "You know how we love to have you here, Billy."

"Do you really?" he asked quickly; and the eagerness of his tone was unmistakable.

The house behind them was the pretty, unpretentious residence of Gunthorpe, the painter. It was the last night of a pleasant little Christmas house-party, before the exodus of four of the six guests, all of whom had been declaring with feeling that they had had "the time of their lives." The Gunthorpes, essentially Bohemians, had gathered others of their kind around them, and understood the art of entertaining better than most society hosts. Ordinary conventions were not practised at Hillside House, and for some days the party had frolicked like a pack of children.

Silence came once again like a barrier between Hailwin and Mary Gunthorpe; and as it grew, both realised with different emotions that it was a barrier difficult to scale or break down. Something waited to be said, and Mary, realising what it was, felt nervous in Hailwin's presence for the first time in her life.

They had been thrown together a great deal since Hailwin had come down, a thing that meant nothing in a house where harmless flirtations were considered as much a part of the day's amusements as billiards or bridge. Mary liked Hailwin, and had certainly flirted with him, but without any intention of doing harm. She had imagined that they had both tacitly agreed to play a game. Until then she had never thought for a single instant that Hailwin had misunderstood her. The thought scared her a little, and made her miserable. She was not in love with Hailwin, but much too fond of him to wish to hurt him.

A strong wind was keeping another fall of snow at bay, and up the long, wooded hillside the trees were bending and sighing. They listened half unconsciously to the melancholy noise, upon which sounds of merriment from the house intruded from time to time. Mary affected to shiver, drew the silk shawl tighter about her shoulders, and made a sudden movement towards the French windows.

"Let's go in," she said briskly.

Hailwin's hand found hers, and closed on it.

"No, no, not yet!" he begged nervously. "I want to tell you something."

She caught her breath, and gave his hand a sudden little squeeze.

"Billy," she whispered, "don't tell me! I know! Oh, Billy—dear! I didn't mean this to happen!"

He looked down at her with a kind of blank dismay.

"You mean—you knew what I was going to say?" he stammered. "I love you! Mary, isn't it any good?"

She was silent a long while, with her gaze bent downwards.

"I—I like you as a friend, Billy; you know I do!"

"That's not what I meant, Mary dear," he answered, half under his breath; and turned, as if to re-enter the house.

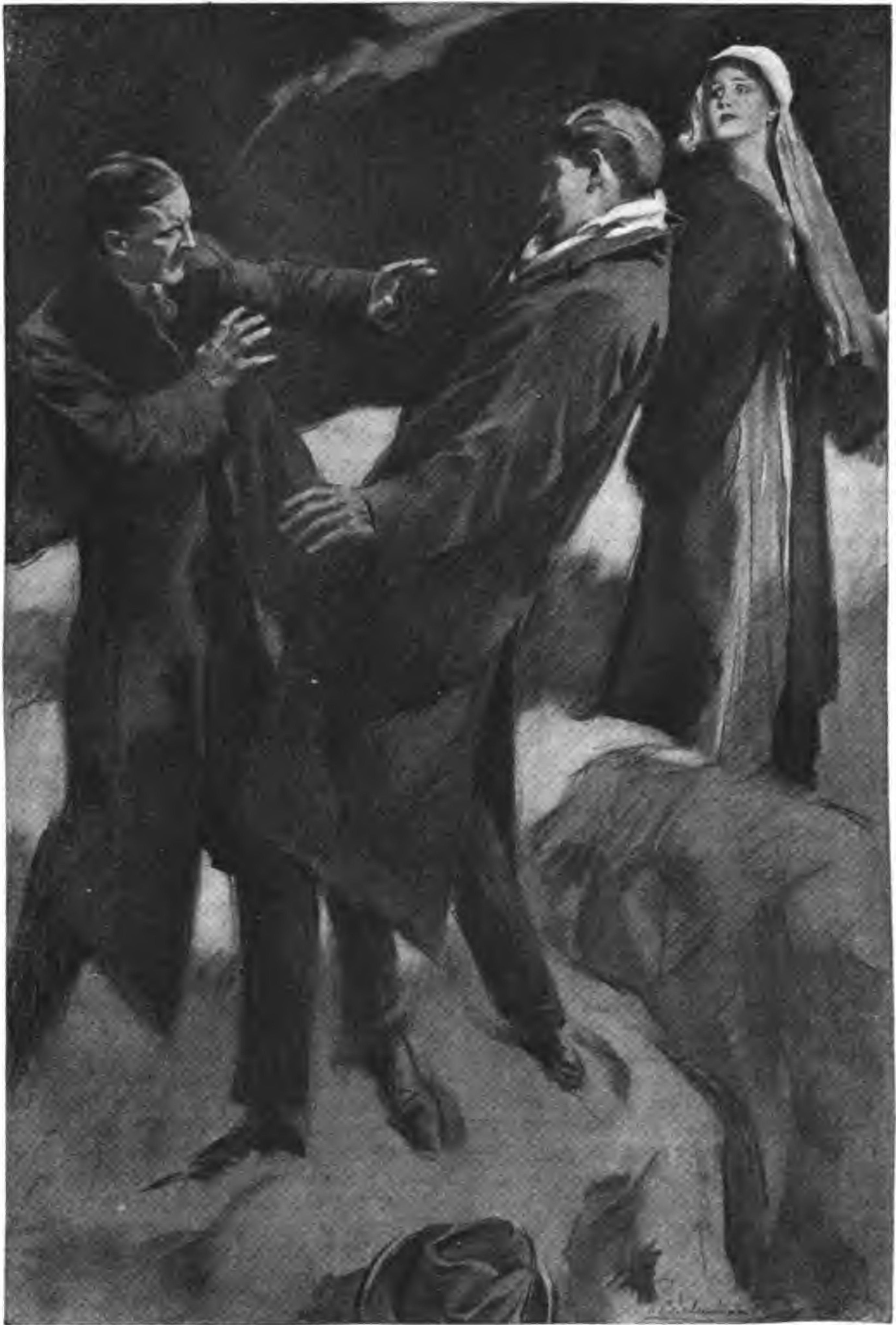
This time it was the girl who was anxious to linger. Now that the ice was broken, she had so much to say, and yet felt almost tongue-tied. She wanted to say something to cheer him, and yet groped in vain after words. She was genuinely distressed and angry with herself. In that moment, pity almost begot in her the love that Hailwin sought.

"Billy," she whispered, "I didn't mean to hurt you. I feel horrible about it. You're not angry with me, are you, Billy?"

"No," he answered gruffly. "What have I to be angry about? I was a fool ever to dream that there was any hope for me, and a worse fool not to understand that you were only playing with me. Still, it's done now. Let's go in."

They went in together, blinking at the sudden glare of artificial light. Mary's eyes were moist and her heart was heavy. Something indefinable in Hailwin's manner told her how deeply he was wounded, and she blamed herself even more than her harshest critic could have done.

She knew, too, that Hailwin was not the only man she had hurt. John Dreeve, who lived half way across the downs, had always been a special friend of hers, but he had not been near the house for days, and had sulked obviously at his last visit when he saw her monopolised by Hailwin. Him, too, she had unconsciously encouraged, caring no more for him than she did for the man at her side.



Mary leaped forward with a moaning cry of horror, as the hands of the thing in Dreeve's likeness shot out suddenly, and the figure of Hailwin went reeling backwards.

The way of the flirt is not easy, if she have a heart.

In the drawing-room four people were playing bridge, of whom only "dummy" appeared to notice their presence. He crossed the room and spoke to Mary, while Hailwin strode across and out into the hall. Mary's brother Dick, coming downstairs from the billiard-room, encountered him there.

"Hallo!" he called out. "The man I was looking for! I'll give you twenty-five in a hundred up, if you and Mary have done with each other for the evening."

Hailwin shook his head.

"No," he said abruptly; "I'm going for a stroll, if you'll excuse me?"

"In all this snow? I say, where on earth?"

"Oh, just round the village. I—I've got something I want to think over—something that's got to be thought out. Sorry to be unsociable."

As he spoke, he took down a light overcoat and slipped his arms through the sleeves. Dick came nearer and regarded him closely.

"What's up?" he asked. "You're looking awfully queer!"

"Yes."

"Anything the matter?"

"Oh, no; nothing. Don't worry, there's a good chap."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"*Cherchez la femme*," he muttered under his breath. "I shall have to talk to my little sister about this." Aloud, he added: "Better take a latchkey, then. The servants are in bed already, and I expect we shall be turning in soon. Mind you do go round the village, by the way—not up on the downs. You won't be able to see your hand in front of you up there, and you'll lose yourself for a certainty. Here, catch!"

He tossed Hailwin the latchkey, and the door slammed a moment later.

"Didn't even say good-night," Dick commented. "This is all Mary's fault. Poor old Hailwin, I ought to have warned him. I must have a chat with the poor old chap to-morrow."

But on the morrow Hailwin did not appear at breakfast, and his bed had not been slept in. They found him lying, with a broken neck, at the bottom of a chalk-pit on the downs.

II.

Mary Gunthorpe was ill and in bed until long after the inquest; and the kindly verdict of Accidental Death was no reassurance to her.

She suffered not only a violent grief at the loss of a man almost as dear to her as her brother, but a thousand vain regrets, and, worse, felt a hideous sense of responsibility. She hypnotised herself into the belief that she had almost loved him, and memory dealt with her relentlessly, taking her back through the irrevocable past a thousand times. She remembered when it had been very pleasant to have Billy near her, when the touch of his hand had given her ever so slight a thrill; when the little, indefinable something which he had lacked seemed almost on the point of materialising.

But this was sorrow, not guilt; and guilt, too, was nearly always with her. Guilt stood between her and sleep, and whispered: "You made him do it! You led him on, and then cast his love back in his face. You drove him mad with misery, so that he threw his life away!"

When Mary, white-faced and silent, was up and about again, she was for ever asking herself the dreadful question which none could answer: "Was it an accident? Did he throw himself down in an excess of bitterness, or was it an accident, as the coroner's jury believed?"

"She is worrying herself to death," the doctor said privately to her father; and the others did their best to reassure her. But the same problem was vexing them, and the false notes in their voices were not lost to the quick ears of the girl.

Half a dozen times Dick walked at night over the ground which Hailwin must have covered. The house stood half way up a steep hill leading to the open downs, and the lane that climbed past the house was flanked with high, wooded banks, so that the trees met overhead. Even on a sunny day parts of it were almost dusk, but at the summit the country was more open, and the chalk-pit lay in a spot bare of trees for some yards around.

"It was dark, and the snow made everything look the same, so he *mightn't* have seen," was Dick's verdict, given to his father. "Besides, he had a pipe in his mouth when he went over. There's just a chance he was lighting it, and

didn't see where he was going. But we shall never know."

"I'm afraid!" said Gunthorpe gloomily. "He knew the pit was there."

"But I don't suppose he was thinking," Dick tried to argue.

The instinct which had made Dick retrace Hailwin's footsteps on the fatal evening also appealed to Mary. She had never been up on the downs at night, and felt a strong desire, which was only half morbid, to walk up through the lane to the edge of the pit, and decide for herself what chance there was that Hailwin might have tumbled over accidentally in the dark. She had read doubt in Dick's eyes when he had told her that the thing was probable, almost certain. She must decide for herself if she were ever again to enjoy happiness and peace of mind.

The opportunity arrived when her father, mother, and Dick were dining with the Dreeves, and she was still too unwell to accompany them. John Dreeve had not been to the house since the tragedy, and they had promised to ask him to lunch on the following day, for Mary fancied that he, too, blamed her for what had happened, and meant to have nothing more to do with her.

When the servants, under the impression that she had gone early to bed, were safe below-stairs, she slipped out and into the drive.

There had been another heavy fall of snow that day, and flakes began again to fall softly as she left the house. It had snowed when Hailwin went out on the night of the tragedy, and the fall had continued for some hours, so that in the morning all trace of his footprints had been blotted out. But it was a night different in character, for now a full moon rode high in the one part of the heavens clear of snow-clouds.

Mary imagined with a heavy heart poor Billy Hailwin going the same way on the night of the tragedy. She could imagine him pausing at the iron gates to take one regretful last look back at the house. Then she pictured his drooping head and loitering footsteps as he staggered up the dark hill-side to his death on the summit.

The pitch-dark lane was full of weird sounds as masses of snow fell from branch to branch and thudded softly on the road. They counterfeited footfalls and whispering

voices, and a hundred other terrors of the dark. Half a dozen times she stopped to listen and strove to pierce the deep gloom with her eyes. Panic was hovering near her, reaching out ice-cold hands; and as often as she stopped she was on the point of turning back.

Then it seemed that her senses were not at fault, that someone was indeed walking with her through the lane. She fancied, with a wildly beating heart, that she could detect a faint shuffling of footfalls through the snow—faint, indeed, but quite audible. That sound surely was not made by the wind, or by falling snow from the trees! She stopped again, but heard nothing, and went on, groping her way through the blackness.

Dogged as she was, she was now terrified. She could *feel* the presence of someone as well as hear it. Someone was walking at the same pace as herself, a few yards in advance. As her ears grew used to the mysterious sounds she could even locate the distance.

Then came a sudden rift in the trees and light in the lane. Above her, the moon looked down through a ragged rift in the moving foliage, and in her path lay a great pool of light, which dazzled her where it lay on the smooth snow. Her heart gave a great leap, and seemed to stop when a figure in front of her walked slowly into the light.

It was the figure of a man, bare-headed and carrying no stick. The head was bowed, the gait and carriage of the body listless. She recognised the figure with a little, half-suppressed cry, even before it turned and she saw the face. It was Hailwin.

He turned and looked at her, and seemed much the same as in life, except that a whole world of mystery and knowledge lay in his eyes. He smiled at her very gravely and kindly, and there was power in the smile to charm away fear, for all the panic evaporated from her blood and left her calm.

He regarded her only for a moment, and then turned again and went on.

"Billy!" she tried to call out, only to find herself tongue-tied.

She followed, knowing that she was meant to follow, knowing that this was no purposeless phantasm; that Hailwin, dressed as he had been on his last walk, had returned to show her how he had come to

meet his death. She walked after him, breathing easily, but strangely alert, hearing him moving before her in the gloom.

Once a doubt seized her lest it should be only a vivid dream, but she heard the trees whispering, and once felt a cold flake of snow upon her face. Then, when the lane came to an end and she reached the open heath at the top, the figure was still walking slowly before her.

She saw it now grope in the pockets of its coat, and take out a pipe, tobacco-pouch, and an automatic lighter, and presently, after a short while, the pouch was replaced.

So occupied had her mind become in these proceedings that she forgot the imminence of the chalk-pit, and looked around suddenly, to see a black void in the midst of the snow. The road, which had now become little better than a rough track, skirted its edge.

The click of the automatic lighter fell sharply upon her ears, and she saw the figure of Hailwin with the head bent low, after the manner of a smoker lighting up. Then he seemed to stumble in a rut hidden by the snow, and the lighter apparently went out. The figure left the track for smoother ground to walk on, and stood almost on the brink of the pit.

Then, as Mary stood watching with clenched hands and craning neck, John Dreeve rose up out of the darkness, and came stumbling towards the figure of Hailwin.

Dreeve looked worn and ghastly. His lips moved as he approached the phantom of Hailwin, but, though the latter seemed to answer him, the dreadful silence was unbroken.

The girl, half fainting with horror, saw both the phantom shapes clench their fists, and then that of Hailwin opened its hands and laughed. It turned from Dreeve with a gesture of contempt, and once more it bent its head, and the flame of the automatic lighter flashed out over the bowl of the pipe.

Mary leaped forward, with a moaning cry of terror, as the hands of the thing in Dreeve's likeness shot out suddenly, and the figure of Hailwin went reeling backwards. She forgot for the moment that what she saw now had happened more than a fortnight since; that the figures were but phantasms of Hailwin and Dreeve, re-enacting the hideous tragedy. It was all

real to her—hideously real. She made as if to clutch at Hailwin with her outstretched hands, and fear burst asunder the bonds that had held her speechless:

"Billy! Mind, for God's sake! Billy! O-oh!"

The figure had disappeared over the brink. It had dropped down, down, down into the chalk-pit. But as she leaned over, trembling and crying, she saw where the lighter had fallen from its hand, and lay on a narrow ledge only a few feet below.

"You've killed him!" she cried. "You've killed him!"

And, as she turned, she saw a look on the face of the murderer's phantom that afterwards haunted her sleep for many a dreadful night. Then the figure slowly dissolved, like wisps of smoke in the wind—a faded phantasm of the living.

III.

She told her story between sobs on the following day. She could cry now more freely than she had ever been able to since Hailwin's death. She read incredulity in the eyes of her parents and Dick, but that mattered little to her. She knew that Hailwin had met his death at the hands of Dreeve, and no argument could shake her belief in what she had seen.

"You say," Gunthorpe questioned judicially, "that he had an automatic pipe-lighter in his hand? I did not know that he possessed such a thing."

"Neither did I," said Dick.

"It dropped from his hand," Mary reiterated, "and fell on a narrow ledge about six feet down."

"Then how is it that it was never found?"

"It must have been covered up by the snow," Mary gasped, "and it hadn't all melted before that fall we had yesterday. You'll find it, I tell you, father, under the snow, if you look. That will prove——"

She broke off, and a fit of trembling seized her.

Gunthorpe nodded at his son.

"You had better look," he said. "It is only fair to Mary. If you do not find it, she will have to confess that her nerves have—— Oh, who's that? Come in!"

The door opened and the parlourmaid entered the room.

"Mr. Dreeve," she said; and stood back against the wall.

Mary started at mention of the name and stood up, white and quivering.

"He mustn't come in here!" Dick whispered hoarsely. "I'll tell him——"

But Dreeve was already in the room. He had been a very frequent visitor, and the maid was used to ushering him straight into the presence of Dick or Mary. He looked pale and haggard, as the Gunthorpes had noticed on the previous night, and spoke quickly and nervously.

"Hullo!" he said to Dick, whose burly form almost eclipsed the others in the background. "I've come to say—about coming to lunch this morning. Awfully sorry, but——"

His voice trailed away into silence as he caught sight of Mary's white face and streaming eyes.

"Mary isn't well," Dick said hastily. "If you don't mind, I think we'd better——"

"You did it!" the girl cried, pushing past her father and advancing towards Dreeve. Her voice was almost as harsh as a man's. "You did it!" she repeated.

Dreeve went back a step, and stammered something in a weak voice.

"Mary, for God's sake!" Dick muttered. "I say, Dreeve, don't mind what she says."

But Mary's voice drowned his, and rang relentlessly through the room.

"You pushed him! You met on the edge of the pit, and quarrelled—about me, I think. I saw you! And you pushed him while he was lighting his pipe. Like this!"

She flung out the palms of her hands, and stood like some tragic statue.

There was dead silence in the room. Then Dreeve collapsed backwards into a chair, and began to sway to and fro and sob. Mrs. Gunthorpe crossed the room, trembling, and led her daughter out. The two men stood and stared at Dreeve in an amazement blent with a kind of pity.

Presently Dreeve began to mutter.

"She knows!" he whimpered. "Oh, my God, how did she know? There was no one there, only he and I and God, Who saw it all!"

"John!" Gunthorpe cried. "In Heaven's name, what are you saying?"

Dreeve looked up and lowered his hands. His face was grey and soiled with tears.

"She knows," he said, quite simply. "The truth is out. You'd better send for the police."

"John!"

"Ah, yes; I know how you feel! I didn't mean to do it! I loved Mary—couldn't you see how I loved her?—and she had no word for me when *he* was about. I was walking down to the village to post a letter, and I met him all alone on the downs. I could have sworn we were all alone. He stood with his back to the pit, and his heels right on the edge, and ten thousand devils were tempting me!"

"I didn't mean to do it. I wanted to feel my fist jar home on his face. But he called me a fool, and told me to play the man. He laughed and half turned away, and started to light his pipe, and his heels were right on the very edge. I thought: 'If I push him!' And then . . . I shouldn't have known I'd done it, but I felt where my hands had touched him, and I heard a long cry and a soft thud, and——"

His voice trailed away into silence, and the two men stood before him quite still and quiet. There was nothing they could say to this young man, whom they had known since his babyhood.

Presently Gunthorpe made an effort, and touched him, not unkindly.

"You must play the man and give yourself up," he said.

Later in the day Dick Gunthorpe returned from a visit to the chalk-pit. He went straight to his father.

"Well?" said Gunthorpe unsteadily.

Dick opened his hand, and showed a metal pipe-lighter, discoloured by exposure.

"It was where Mary said," he muttered hoarsely. "None of us knew poor old Billy had one—not even Mary. I found it on a bit of a ledge, inches deep in the snow. She—she must have seen something, father."

Gunthorpe took the automatic lighter in a hand that trembled.

"We'd better tell her," he muttered. "It will set her mind at rest. She'll know that it was through no direct fault of hers that Hailwin died. I think poor Billy wanted her to know that; that was why he—he must have come back. But we don't know; we get such little glimpses of the after-life. Go and tell her, Dick."

On his own confession, John Dreeve was convicted, and served a lenient sentence for manslaughter.

The SACRIFICE

A COMPLETE STORY

By
A. M. BURRAGE

ILLUSTRATED BY G. C. WILMSHURST

G WENETH FAIRCHANCE, having insisted upon removing her outdoor garments before taking tea, re-entered the drawing-room after a brief absence with one of the Rodhurst girls who had conducted her to her room.

Guy Rodhurst immediately took possession of her and found her a chair. He had already made it clear to the rest of the family that Gweneth was, if possible, to be his especial companion during her visit; and the family, not at all adverse to her as a possible relation-in-law, was prepared to fall in with his wishes.

Tea was nearly over, and Guy, having performed his duties as a son of the house, brought her a cup and a well-laden cake-stand with many shelves, and seated himself beside her. He was grinning like a schoolboy unexpectedly presented with a handsome tip.

"It's frightfully jolly to see you here, Gwennie!" he began; and then got up to drag the cake-stand a little nearer. "I say, you must be peckish after your journey. Do try and eat something solid—muffins or something. Dinner's not until eight-thirty to-night."

The girl smiled and took a frail-looking and undersized sandwich. Long as she had known Guy, she was a little shy of him in his own house. Besides, her woman's intuition made her aware that he would ask her a certain question before the house-party broke up, and she had not quite decided how she should answer it.

"Isn't it funny," she said smiling, "that this is the first time I've ever been here, when we've known each other—let's see—five years at least?"

"It isn't because you weren't invited," Guy responded. "Every time we asked you, there was some wretched old excuse or other. We were beginning to think we'd never rope you in. Well, what do you think of the old show?"

The girl's eyes glistened.

"It's the loveliest house I've ever been in," she said. "I never thought there could be such a place outside a book of fairy tales. Uncle Jim's got an old manor house in Yorkshire that wants some beating; but this place—it—it's a poem, Guy!"

The young man smiled and met her gaze. He was glad to hear her praise the old house, for he was genuinely proud of it. "Some day it might be mine," he thought, and for that reason, too, he was pleased to hear her praise it.

"Marjorie didn't show you round, did she?" he asked.

Gweneth shook her head.

"No; we went straight to my room and back. She had to hustle me, or I should have stood in the hall all the evening, admiring it. I looked out for the famous skull, but didn't see it. I thought it was kept in a glass case in a niche at the head of the stairs."

Guy offered her the cake-stand and set it down again.



"I love you!" Gweneth went on repeating in her queer, strained voice. "I want to die with you! I don't want to live without you, Guy!" "Gwennie," he said, choking, "why did you want to die? You've made me so—so miserable now!"

"So it is," he said; "but if you went straight to your room you wouldn't have seen it. The staircase splits into a Y, and you took the right-hand turning. The skull stands on the other landing. I'll show it to you presently."

"Do," she laughed. "I'm dying to be introduced. It's an interesting old relic; but isn't it a bit gruesome?"

"It is a bit," he admitted.

"Then why not get rid of it?"

The young man laughed uncomfortably.

"Well," he said, "you know why. I've told you the old yarn stacks of times. It belonged to one of my ancestors. He ordered that his skull should be kept there as long as the house stood, and cursed all those who should dare to move it. Anyone who moves it dies within twenty-four hours."

"Even if they only move it from the niche and bring it back immediately afterwards?"

"Yes, even then."

The girl puckered her brows.

"Suppose," she suggested, "somebody moved it away altogether, and didn't bring it back. What would happen after he—er—died?"

"The head of the house would be responsible for replacing it. That happened once. It was when the Great Plague was sweeping across England. It was put back in its place just in time to save the life of the last member of the family."

Gweneth smiled at his earnestness.

"Coincidence," she said.

"Yes, perhaps." He did not want Gweneth to laugh at him.

"Guy," she exclaimed, "surely you don't believe in the curse being fulfilled?"

He looked her in the face, meeting rather sheepishly the amused expression of her eyes.

"I'm afraid I do," he said gravely. "You see . . . there have been cases . . ."

"You don't remember any!" she bantered him.

"No, but—"

"Your great-great-grandfather died after moving it. I know! Of course, nobody remembers him, but the story goes that he was a victim of the curse. Probably the story wasn't invented until the next generation."

"Don't make fun, Gwennie," he begged.

"Those things never happen to anyone we know," she went on. "They're like ghost stories; we only hear them at second or third hand."

"You should talk to the pater," Guy answered. "He could tell you a few things about the skull, and not all of them at second or third hand either."

Gweneth pursed her lips, and so avoided showing a smile of unbelief. She could not very well say that she was prepared to doubt Sir Kenneth Rodhurst's word.

"I can see we shall fight presently if we say much more on the subject," she remarked, laughing. "Still, I'm going to try to break you of being superstitious, Guy. A young man like you, too, in this enlightened age! It's awfully nice to have a legend like that in the family, though, and I'm longing to see the skull. Take me up now. Do you mind?"

Guy Rodhurst seized upon the opportunity of snatching a few minutes alone with her.

"Right-oh!" he said with alacrity. "Sure you've finished tea? Let's cut along, then." He jumped up and touched his sister's arm. "Going to introduce Gwennie to our pet ornament. Sha'n't be long."

Marjorie looked round and laughed.

"Mind you're polite to it, Gwennie," she said. "Perhaps," she added slyly, "you'll be able to read the riddle."

They slipped out of the room almost unnoticed, for a general discussion had been started in which all the eight or ten guests who were spending Christmas at King's Mitford were keenly interested. Out in the square hall they paused, Gweneth looking round with a smile of admiration on her lips.

It was already dusk, and two boat-lamps, swinging on brass chains from the high ceiling, supplied what light there was. The walls were draped with shadows, relieved by little twinkling gleams on the polished surface of the panels. Holly festooned the walls, mistletoe dangled from each of the lamps, and a long chain of evergreens went the length of the gallery overhead, drooping in graceful loops. The floor was of polished boards strewn over with rugs, an ideal floor for dancing on when the rugs were gathered up. Opposite where they stood was a high, open fireplace of carved oak, and on the hearth some

half dozen logs were burning frostily, dropping little mounds of soft, white ash.

"This place makes me feel like Christmas," said Gwennie. "I couldn't realise that it was Christmas Eve until just now, when I came in. Everything's perfect, right down to the yule logs.

He led her to the staircase, passing under one of the dangling wisps of mistletoe. He glanced up at it, and then at Gweneth, but she seemed demurely unconscious. Any other girl he would have kissed promptly enough, but because he loved Gweneth he lost his nerve and let the chance go.

"What was the riddle Marjorie said something about?" Gweneth asked, as they made their way up the wide staircase.

"Oh, that? You'll see presently." He felt himself flushing. "Marjorie's a silly old thing sometimes. Here we are!"

They stood side by side, gazing at the grizzly relic which the whim of a former Rodhurst had decreed should linger there and be the silent witness of all that passed within the house. The glass case containing the skull fitted almost exactly into a niche about six feet from the ground, so that a tall man came face to face with the dread reminder of death. Over the top of the skull a brass tablet was affixed to the back of the case, and on it was inscribed, in old English characters, the legend:

"Love lyftes ye curse. Sacrifice is my price."

Gweneth, puckering her brows, spelt out the first word with difficulty. Guy looked round at her, smiling.

"Love lifts the curse," he said. "That's the riddle Marjorie spoke of."

She glanced at the tablet again, still frowning slightly.

"Yes, but what does it mean?"

"Nobody knows its application," he answered. "It's been there from time immemorial. We take it to be a kind of riddle. In some way love can lift the curse which falls on the man who moves the skull—but how love can do it nobody has ever guessed."

"Oh!" The girl began to tap her foot. She was shy of speaking to Guy of love, and Marjorie's innuendo had been so very obvious. She sought in haste for some other subject.

"Surely you don't believe that thing can hurt you!" she cried.

The young man fidgeted.

"I say, Gwennie, don't let's talk about that," he said. "We shall only row, you know. It's all very well for you to talk, but you haven't lived here all your life as I have; you don't know how that curse has been fulfilled time and again."

"Don't be an old silly, Guy! It annoys me to hear you talk like that. I don't mind moving it, and I bet I don't die within twenty-four hours."

"Gwennie," he said abruptly, coming between her and the case, "I forbid you to touch it!"

"Do you?" She looked up at him with more than a suggestion of hauteur in the poise of her head. "If you talk to me like that I shall certainly move it."

"You will not!" The young man's face was white and set, and his eyes flashed angrily. "Gwennie, Heaven knows there's only that one thing which would force me to remind you that you are our guest, and that there is a tacit understanding that you obey the rules of the house. It is a rule of the house that that case shall not be touched."

She was not offended, knowing him to be very much in earnest. She, however, continued to tease him.

"If you'll move it," she said, "I'll promise not to touch it. There!"

"Gwennie! For God's sake!"

She turned round upon him impatiently.

"Afraid of that! That poor little piece of bone. Oh, Guy, Guy! Yes, you've all been afraid of it for years, for generations, and nobody has moved it. If anybody had the story would have been exploded."

"I tell you, Gwennie, that people *have* moved it, and died."

She laughed scornfully.

"Oh, yes, I understand. Every time anybody's died suddenly, all the others have said he moved the skull. Why don't you be a man, Guy? Move it, and explode the story for ever. You won't die!"

"Don't, Gwennie!" he begged. Little drops of sweat were beginning to shine on his forehead.

There is an instinct in the best of women which makes them sometimes want to hurt the men they are most fond of. She had lost patience with Guy. It annoyed her to think that the man for whom she had a regard that was something more than friendly should be so wrapped about with

superstition, so cowardly over so small a matter.

"I want to see you move it," she said relentlessly. "I defy you to move it! If you don't, I shall call you a——"

"I'm not a funk!" he interrupted quickly. "You know I'm not, Gwennie."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I've dared you to move it," she said simply.

He turned quickly away from her, white and passionate. He was not a man given to gloating over the fine traditions of his family, but he was proudly conscious of having sprung from a race of men who would not have brooked being called coward by the women they loved. Many had gone unwavering to certain death. Down in the hall was the portrait of a soldier uncle, and underneath it, instead of the V.C. he did not live to win, a broken sword that spoke more eloquently than any voice. He remembered being taught to salute the portrait as a little boy, and how he had whispered "Good-night" to it on his way to bed.

He took the case out of the niche with steady hands, and walked with it to the gallery railing. Then he turned and faced the girl, white, but calm.

"Does that satisfy you, Gwennie?" he asked, speaking very slowly lest he should stammer.

"Now you'll die!" said Gwennie, still declining to be serious.

He replaced the case, and as he did so, felt her hand on his arm.

"No, but it *was* brave of you, Guy," she said. "Poor old boy, I'm sure you really believe it still. I've been perfectly beastly to you. I'm sorry, Guy."

She was melting towards him now, and he knew that the time was ripe to tell her of his love. But he checked the words that would have rushed to his lips, believing that he had but a few short hours to live. His brain was clogged with the thousand thoughts that came crowding in. He managed to laugh, and put on an air of carelessness.

"It's all right, Gwen," he said. "I'm not at all sure that I believe in the thing myself. Don't feel a bit like dying, anyhow. I say, though, don't tell anybody what I've done. You see, the others—they all believe it—they'd be frightened."

"I won't tell a soul until after this

time to-morrow night," Gwenth answered. She was watching him narrowly, and saw clearly enough that he believed he had forfeited his life.

"Poor old boy!" she said, smiling, with a soft light in her eyes. "I am a wretch!"

"No, you're not, Gwennie," Guy answered. "I say, there's Marjorie down in the hall. Will you excuse me? There's a couple of letters I must write before the half-past six post goes. See you presently."

His bed-room was quite near at hand. He entered, and flung himself down in an armchair, leaning forward with his face between his hands.

"Gwennie," he murmured, "you didn't know—you didn't know! You've killed me, Gwennie!"

It was of her he was thinking—her feelings when his death should prove to her that the curse was a potent thing. The thought of his own trouble scarcely affected him then.

II.

King's Mitford was the kind of house to harbour the Christmas spirit, and after dinner that night nobody seemed to want to play bridge. By common consent they assembled in the hall, and took seats around the generous fire. With the one exception of Guy, the little party was in the mood for round games and childish frivolities. Marjorie Rodhurst, sitting on a little pile of cushions in the middle of the semi-circle, stroking her scorched shins, suggested that it was the time and the place for somebody to tell a ghost story.

"Fire away, then," urged Captain Neverston, a young cavalry officer enjoying a prolonged spell of sick leave. "I like the ones with plenty of screams in them, and chains clanking, and a nice sprinkling of gore. Eighteenth-century ladies pottering about in high-heeled shoes and rustling silk dresses are much too tame. We want a real thrill from you, Miss Rodhurst."

The girl laughed, and shook her head.

"I don't know any," she said. "I've forgotten all I ever heard. Here's a chance for some of you raconteurs. Put down a half-crown, each of you, and the pool goes to the first one to make Captain Neverston shiver."

"Right-oh!" Neverston laughed. "I'm

open to do business with anyone. I'll shiver to order for half the winnings. Come on now, who're the starters?"

There was a short spell of silence, and Lady Rodhurst laughed.

"Everyone's very backward to-night," she remarked. "Haven't you a ghostly huntsman in the family, Captain Neverston? Won't you start by telling us about that?"

"I'm the adjudicator, Lady Rodhurst," he answered. "Besides, our huntsman isn't a bit interesting."

"Don't you think," said Gweneth, with a sly, sidelong glance at Guy, "that we ought to be told some stories about the skull. We've all seen it, and heard all sorts of things. Can't you tell us some real cases in which the curse has fallen upon the people who moved it, Sir Kenneth?"

Old Sir Kenneth Rodhurst smiled pleasantly, but he contrived to show by his smile that he did not like to hear the skull spoken of flippantly.

"There have been plenty of cases," he said gravely.

A silence fell upon the little group around the fire, and somebody whispered, "Ssh!" Sir Kenneth laughed.

"Oh, I'm not going to tell any stories," he said.

Instantly there were little sounds of disappointment, followed by a chorus of "Please!" and "Oh, do, Sir Kenneth!"

"Oh, well," he said, good-humouredly, "there are several cases on record, but I'm no good at telling stories, you know. One chap, my grandfather's brother, moved the skull for a wager one night after his third bottle. It was in the Regency days, when young men seemed to wager from the time they got up to the time they were carried to bed. Anyhow, Gilbert Rodhurst took the case out of the niche, put it back, and took his guineas. Next morning he died of a gun accident."

"Rather queer, that," Neverston murmured beneath his breath.

"Then there was an uncle of mine. He was a queer fellow, and got himself into the hands of some folks who called themselves, if I remember, the Anti-Superstitions Society. Well, he moved the case, to prove that there was nothing in the old legend of the curse, and broke his neck five minutes afterwards, falling downstairs."

Gweneth looked up quickly. Sir

Kenneth was a man of undoubted integrity, and the two stories formed at the least a very strange coincidence. She was not actually frightened, but she could feel her heart stirring beneath her breast.

"Do you remember that, Sir Kenneth?" she asked.

"No," he answered; "it was just before I was born. But one case does come within my memory. We had a man stopping here once, who moved it. That was when I was a boy. It was the poor fellow's own fault. All our guests know the legend, and he——"

Captain Neverston interrupted with a little laugh which seemed forced and nervous.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but I thought the curse only descended on members of the family."

The older man shook his head.

"No! On anybody who takes the skull out of the case or moves the case."

Neverston slowly changed colour, but only for the fraction of a second did his face reflect the horror that had fallen cold upon his heart. After a moment he even contrived to smile.

"I say, you know," he chattered, in a voice that he could only partly control, "I didn't know that. Thought it was only members of the family. I shifted the blessed thing last night." He bit his under lip to keep it still. "I say," he added with a metallic laugh, "I s'pose my number's up, what?"

Dead silence fell upon the semi-circle around the fire. Marjorie drew a long, laboured breath that sounded like a sob. Then Sir Kenneth spoke.

"Oh, no!" he ejaculated, and laughed; but the laugh was even more forced than Neverston's. "I—I was only telling stories. They sound much more interesting if you pretend they're true. Don't you worry, Neverston."

Neverston laughed again. He had had a shock, but he came easily under his own control.

"Of course," he said, "I twigged that. After all, what could an old skull do to a feller—what? I was passing it last night on my way up to bed, and stopped to take a squint at it. And I said, 'You old blighter! Why do you want to stick there for ever, and not let any of your own

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family move you?' Then I gave him a bit of a shake up. Didn't know he objected to strangers touching him, or I might have funk'd it. Well, if I'm going to peg out within twenty-four hours I haven't got long."

"Oh, you're all right," said Guy, himself pale and anxious. "I never saw a man looking less likely to go under than you."

Conversation broke out all around the circle like a straggling volley of musketry. Men and women all talked rapidly to relieve the tension. But Fear was with them in the hall, sitting at each one's elbow.

Captain Neverston leaned sideways and addressed Guy in an undertone.

"Sorry I heard that yarn when I did," he whispered, "for I wasn't feeling up to much. You know I strained my heart playin' polo? Well, it's still a bit jiggery, and if I get the slightest touch of indigestion——"

"Let me get you a brandy," Guy interrupted quickly. "Sit there quietly."

"No, thanks; I'll come with you if I may. 'Sall right—I can walk. My heart is popping a bit, but—don't want 'em all to think I'm in a blue funk because of that story. Half a moment."

He began slowly to rise to his feet, and then suddenly collapsed backwards into his chair.

"Oh!" he cried out sharply. "Oh!"

Guy, with feverish hands, fumbled at his collar. There was a rustling of skirts, and a sound of chairs being pushed back. With blanched faces and eyes full of dread, they gathered around Neverston's chair. Only Sir Kenneth spoke.

"Give him air—give him air!" he said sharply.

But Neverston had already ceased to breathe.

III

Boom! A single stroke from the clock in the church across the park, faint as the sound was, jerked Guy Rodhurst's disordered nerves, so that his pen drew a crooked line across the letter he was on the point of signing.

"One o'clock," he said to himself. "Only one more letter, and then—and then I suppose I shall turn in."

For two hours he had sat writing, under the hand of death, brief notes of farewell to friends, business letters which were to

be posted "afterwards." He had led a simple life, and his affairs were well in order. He had, moreover, very little to regret, no more than most good men with sound consciences.

He had written slowly, for many reflections had interrupted him, making little barriers between pen and paper. He was quite sure that he must die, but the manner of his death was yet hidden from him, and this gave rise to much idle speculation in his mind. He was not afraid of death, but, by the usual irony of Fate, life was now sweeter to him than it had ever been before. If earlier in the evening he had been tempted to hope that the curse and its inevitable fulfilment were only a myth, the sudden and tragic death of poor Neverston had soon convinced him of the contrary.

The little party of guests had gone to bed long since. On the morrow they would quit the house of death; and he hoped, for his people's sake, that the last would be gone before his own time came. It might come any moment.

Nobody but Gweneth knew that he, too, had placed himself under the ban of the dreadful element which took relentlessly a life for every breach of a dead man's law. She had snatched an interview with him in private, and the memory of it thrilled his blood and made death a thousand times harder to face. There had been something more than remorse and passionate contrition in her eyes—there had been love.

She loved him, and life was glorious, and he had to die. Just at odd moments he lost mastery of himself at the thought, and his nails bit deeply into the palms of his hands. Life had given him all that he asked, but only for a few brief hours.

Gweneth, self-accusing, passionate, choking with sobs, had rested in his arms. She believed in the curse now; she could not choose but believe. He had had to quiet her, to try without avail to make her believe that the fault was not hers, that perhaps, after all, he might escape. As he sat there, the memory of her kisses stole upon him, her wet cheek resting for a moment against his, her strangled sobs and the painful heaving of her shoulders. He was filled with a dreadful pity for her, knowing that she would never cease to blame herself. If he could have died

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twice over to spare her the agony of regret he would have done it readily.

With an effort he wrenched his thoughts away from her. One more letter remained to be written. He picked up his pen once more, and, reaching forward, plucked a sheet of paper from the upright writing-case. He remained in the awkward attitude deathly still, as if suddenly bereft of the nerves of motion.

A sound on the landing outside had fallen distinctly upon his ears, a creeping, shuffling noise. He listened breathlessly, and caught another faint sound, as of something being dragged. Then, while his heart began to thump, he fancied he caught the sound of somebody choking back a cough.

"Burglars!" said a voice inside his head. "Burglars!"

Very stealthily he got upon his legs and tiptoed to the door. He thought now that he could see very clearly what was written in the book of Fate. He was to be killed by burglars, whom he was about to disturb. He looked down at his hands to make sure that he was not afraid, and saw, with a kind of pride, that they were steady.

Standing by the door he could still hear sounds, but they were vague and undefinable. Once he thought: "I needn't go out; I can pretend not to hear!" But he dismissed the suggestion from his mind with a quick shrug of scorn. He had to die, so why not in the defence of his father's property? If he skulked in his room, death would find out some other chink in his armour. At least, he thought, he would show a bold front and die like a man.

Weaponless as he was, he opened his door and strode out on to the landing. There was still a light in the hall which threw up a faint glow, against which was silhouetted a figure standing on the top of the stairs. He uttered a little sharp exclamation. It was Gweneth.

She turned and saw him, and approached him slowly, half laughing, half crying. In her arms she carried the glass case in which rested the skull. Guy stumbled, uttering a little choking cry of horror, and balanced himself against the wall.

"Heavens!" he said faintly. "Gwennie, Gwennie, what have you done?"

She was still wearing the dress she

had worn at dinner. Evidently she had been sitting up in her room, tormenting herself to the verge of madness by grief and remorse. At his words she seemed to collect her wits, and addressed him with a queer note of defiance in her voice.

"I don't care! I moved it because—because I want to die, too. I couldn't live after—after what I'd done. I love you! I want to die with you!"

It seemed to Guy as if he were a pivot around which everything was gliding. Without a word, he took the glass case gently out of her hands and replaced it in the niche. And all the time Gweneth went on repeating in her queer, strained voice:

"I love you! I want to die with you! I don't want to live without you, Guy!"

"Gwennie!" he said, choking. Then "You shouldn't have done it!" he gasped hoarsely. "Oh, Gwennie, why did you want to die? You've made me so—so miserable now."

Her arms were open, and as he advanced she twined them around his neck. He picked her up, and strained her to him in silence. They stood thus for a short while, their shadows falling across the glass case and its ghastly contents.

"If we could only live!" she murmured. "I'd make you such a good wife, Guy. Is there nothing we can do to live together instead of die together?"

She let her head droop on to his shoulder, and the shadow passed away from the case. The light stealing up from the hall feebly illumined the interior. Guy gave vent to a sudden shout.

"Look, Gwennie," he cried, "look! You've saved us both! You've saved us! Oh, Gwennie!"

"What!"

She slipped from his embrace, and stood panting beside him.

"Look!" he cried, pointing. "You tried to throw away your life so that we might die together. Look, Gwennie! Now we know what it means. Don't you see? You made the great sacrifice—for love! Don't you see?"

He was pointing with a shaking forefinger at the tablet inside the case, where the dim light just made discernible the words that had puzzled many generations of Rodhursts:

"Love lyftes ye curse. Sacrifice is my price!"



The Exploits of Captain Gault

EXTRACTS FROM THE
PRIVATE LOG OF A
MASTER MARINER

By
WILLIAM
HOP/E
HODGSON

IX.—The Painted Lady.

ILLUSTRATED BY SEPTIMUS E. SCOTT.

S.s. Boston.

April 2nd. Evening.

I had a splendid offer made me to-day. A man came aboard, with what looked like a drawing-board wrapped in brown paper.

He had a letter of introduction from a man who knows me.

"My name's Black, as I guess Mr. Abel's told you in the letter," he said. "I want to talk business with you, Cap'n Gault."

"Go ahead!" I said.

"What I say, goes no further; that's understood, I guess?" he asked. "Mr. Abel gave you a good name, cap'n, an' he

told me a thing or two about you that sounded pretty safe to me."

"I'm mum!" I told him. "If you've murdered someone, it's no concern of mine, and I don't want to hear about it. If it's anything clean, get it off your chest. You'll find me a good listener."

He nodded.

"You know about that 'Mona Lisa' bit of goods?" he asked me.

"The picture?" I said.

He nodded again.

"Well," he said, "they got the wrong one. That's a copy that's been made from the original. It's a mighty good copy. It

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should be ; it cost me over twenty thousand dollars before it was finished. It's so good, you couldn't make 'em believe it isn't the original. I got the original, though, safe and sound ; and a patron of mine's mad for it. That's what I came to see you about. I've got to get it taken across and through the U.S.A. Customs."

"But you don't tell me that a copy could fool all the art experts who've seen the 'recovered' 'Mona Lisa'?" I said.

"Why, the old canvas——"

"Wood, cap'n," he interpolated.

"It's on wood, is it?" I said. "I'd never realised that. Well, you don't tell me they don't know the kind of wood, and the smell, and the general oldness and the 'seasonedness,' and all the rest of it, of a panel of wood as old as that must be. The very smell of it would be enough to tell them whether it was the original or not.

"And that's not all. Why, the pigments they used, they can't be matched to-day, so I understand. And how'd you get the 'time tone,' the 'time surface'? Why, man, any one of these things could never be faked properly—not well enough to deceive an expert who knew his business.

"Don't you see, your tale won't wash. All these things put together make a picture as famous as the 'Gioconda' absolutely unforgeable—that is, of course, to an expert."

"Now, cap'n," he said, "you've had your say, and I will have mine.

"First of all, to get a panel that could not be pronounced anything but genuine, cap'n, I had the 'Mona Lisa' panel split, using a special machine-saw for the purpose. It was an anxious job, I can promise you. The man who cut it was an expert at his job, and the saw was a specially made ribbon saw, with hair-fine teeth.

"He practised on a dozen model panels before I'd let him split the 'Mona.' Then he put the picture flat on the steel saw-table, and he just skinned off the 'Mona' with no more than an eighth of an inch of wood under her. He did it as easy and smooth as skinning milk ; but I just stood and sweated till it was done. He got a hundred dollars for that ten minutes bit of work, and I guess I got a hundred extra grey hairs.

"Well, cap'n, then I took the 'Mona,' and mounted her on a brand-new panel,

for she was on a layer of wood so thin that she bent just with picking her up.

"That's how we got the panel for the copy. The copy's painted on the old 'Mona Lisa' panel. Smart, wasn't it? I guess the experts couldn't get past that—what? Not much, sir!

"Queer, when you come to think of it, cap'n, that if those Frenchmen only thought to notice it—not that they could, after not seeing the lady for a couple of years—they'd the right clue there, in the thinner panel, that the 'Mona's' been doctored!

"Great, I call it! And she'll hang there all through the ages ; and people'll come from all parts, and stare and gasp and go away, feeling they've seen only the genuine. And all the time she'll be where all the real stuff's going—in God's own country, sir—U.S.A.

"And to think a pair of callipers would give the whole show away, if only they'd taken the thickness of the panel *before* a friend of mine lifted her out of the Louvre!"

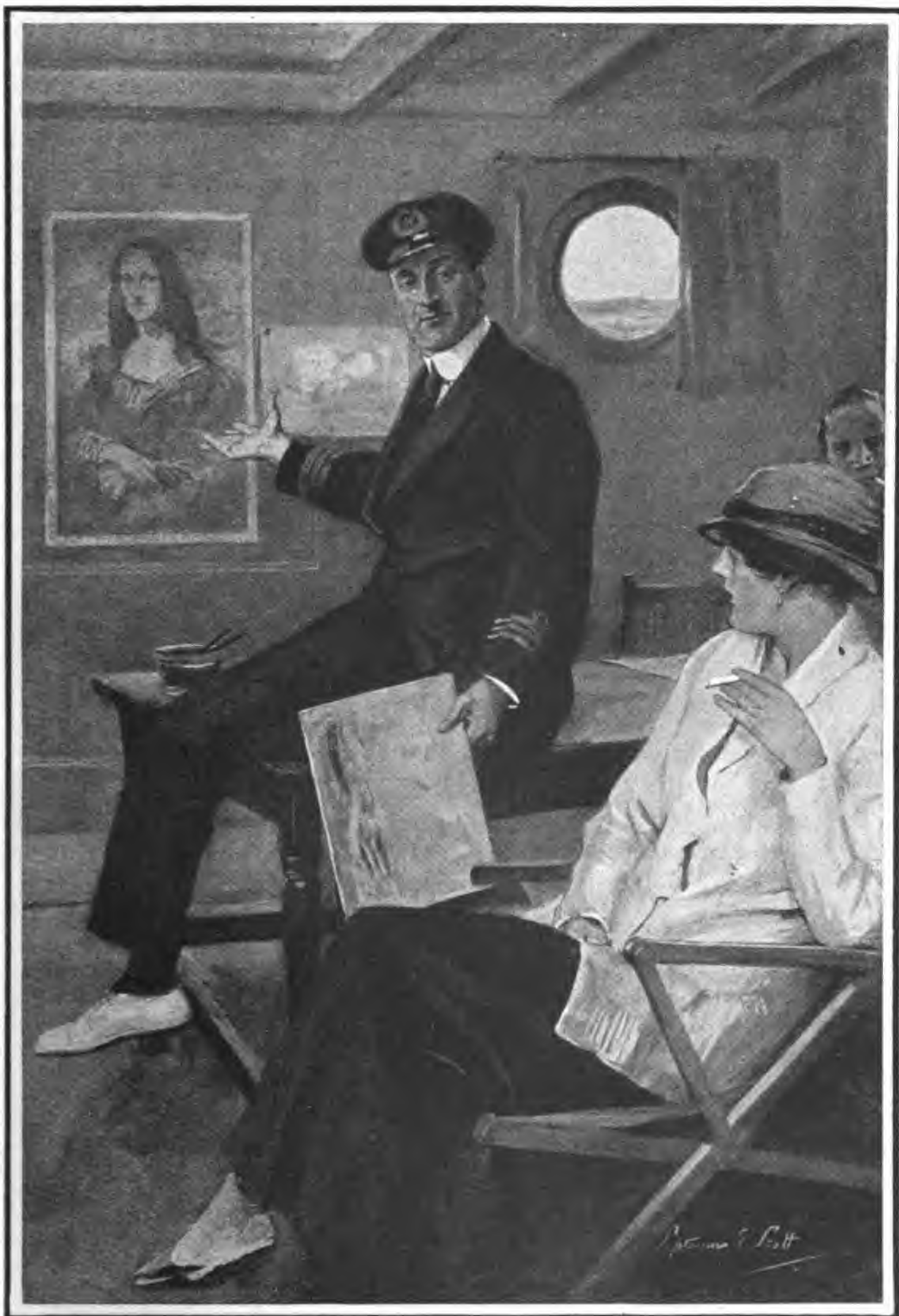
"That was smart, certainly," I said. "You can spin a good yarn! What about the old pigments, and all the rest of the impossible things, eh?"

"The pigments, cap'n, cost me exactly fifteen thousand dollars in cold cash. I bought old canvasses of the same period—some of them were not bad, either—and I scraped 'em, sir. Yes, I did, for the pigments that were on 'em. Nearly broke my heart! But this is a big business. Then an old painter I know got the job of his life. He's as clever a man as ever stole a canvas 'cause he hadn't money to pay for it.

"I told him there were five thousand big fat dollars for him the day he'd finished a copy of her on the wooden panel ; that's if the copy were so good I couldn't tell one from the other.

"Well, cap'n, he did it. Three months he took ; and when it was finished, I couldn't have told one painting from the other, except that the new one wanted 'sunning'—that's a little secret of my own. I do part of it with a mercury lamp, and part of it with the sun and coloured glass. I gave her a solid year of that treatment, while she was drying and hardening. Then I'd have defied L. da V. himself to tell one from t'other!"

"But what was the idea of getting this



"Dear lady," I said, "you admit my copy of the 'Gloconda' is not so bad."

"By the side of the original," she smiled at me, "it is as a ginger-pop bottle beside a Venetian glass wonder. You've sure got a hearty, healthy conceit of yourself, cap'n! Why, cap'n, you've painted your copy with eyebrows!" she added suddenly.

copy made for twenty thousand dollars, when you had the real thing?"

"It was for the French Government to sneak," he told me.

"What?" I said.

"It was for a plant!" he explained.

"It was going to be 'planted,' and then an agent of mine was going to approach a picture-dealer and offer to sell it to him—as the real thing, you know.

"And, of course, I knew no dealer on the east side of the duck-pond would look at it. No use to anyone there, except to get 'em into bad trouble. I knew the next thing they'd do would be to lay information, for the sake of the reward and the Press notices."

"Well," I asked, "what had you to gain by all that, and what did you gain by getting your agent into the hands of the police?"

"He bungled things!" he told me. "It wasn't my fault he got nabbed."

"But the reason you wanted the authorities to cop the copy you'd spent twenty thousand dollars on?" I asked again. "If you were so anxious for them to have a copy, why didn't you offer to sell it back? They'd have paid a decent sum—quite decent, I should imagine—that's if they couldn't get their hands on you first!"

"That's just the point," he explained. "If I'd offered to sell back the picture, they'd have approached it in a more suspicious spirit; and I want no blessed suspicions at all, cap'n. If they thought I was trying to get rid of the original secretly to a dealer, and that they had dropped on me unexpectedly, then their whole frame of mind would be the way I want it to be—see?"

"You see, cap'n, I paid twenty thousand dollars odd to get that copy made, simply for a blind. I'm taking the original out to U.S.A., where I've got a patron for it at five hundred thousand dollars, as I've told you.

"But he won't even look at it, if there's going to be any bother attached. I've to clean up behind me. I'm to let the French Government have back what they think is their picture; and then my patron can hang the original in his private gallery, without fear of trouble.

"He's a real collector, and it's sufficient for him to know he's got the original,

under his own roof-slates, without wanting to shout the song half across the world, like a society hostess.

"If there are any comments, he'll acknowledge it to be what it isn't—and that's a *copy*. This is bound to go down, as people are convinced the original is clamped up good and solid, back in its old place in the Louvre. Thank God for that sort of collector, I say! They make living possible for people in my business. Now, have you got all the points, cap'n?"

He grinned so cheerfully, that I had to do the same thing.

"But all the same," I told him, "I'm not available for handling stolen goods, Mr. Black. You'll have to try further up."

"Come now, Cap'n Gault," he said, "and you a good American, too! I guess we've got to have this bit of goods in little old U.S.A. It's too fine for any other nation on earth. You mustn't think it's *only* the dollars I'm thinkin' of. If it were just the dollars only I'm after, I'd sell it right here, within twenty-four hours, and be shut of all trouble and risk; but it's got to go over to our country, cap'n, and stay right there till it's acclimatised."

I couldn't help liking the man for that. But I had to stare at him a bit, to size up how much he was honest and how much I was dreaming; but he was honest, right enough; and I felt I'd got to look good and hard, so that I'd not forget what an honest picture-dealer looked like.

"It's a pity you can't put it through, openly, as the original," I said. "You'd have no duty at all to pay then, seeing that it's more than a hundred years old. Anyway, why don't you put the thing through yourself, as a copy? If your customer's going to manage to palm it off to his friends (and there's likely to be some experts among 'em) as a copy, why don't you put it through the Customs frankly, as a copy? There'll be nothing much to bother about in the duty-line on a mere copy by an unknown artist. Shove a fairly good price on it, so they won't think you're trying to 'jew' them, and there you are. Anyway, mister, that'll come a heap cheaper than paying me what I should need, before I'd even look at a job of this sort."

He put his finger to the side of his nose, in French fashion.

"Don't you worry, cap'n," he replied.

"That picture's worth five hundred thousand dollars; and I guess I'm taking no chances at all. You must reckon there's others that guess things about this besides me, and it ain't only the Customs I'm bothering about, but it's a little bunch of crooks that have got to suspecting more than's good for them. And I guess if they can't get a finger in the pie, they're capable of dropping a hint to the New York Customs, just for spite.

"If the Customs put their eyes on the picture, after a hint like that, they'd hold it and communicate with the French authorities, and it'd be all U.P. then, once the two pictures were put together and compared.

"And, anyhow, cap'n, I reckon there may be a bit of trouble going across, for the gang'll never drop trying until it's 'no go' for them. They'll sail with the picture and me, on the chance of nipping in before we get to the other side. I'd not be surprised if they came across with a proposal to go shares or split, if they can't do me in any other way. Now, what's it to be, Cap'n Gault—are you on, or is it 'no go'?"

I thought for a few seconds, then I answered him.

"I'll do it," I said. "I guess I'd like it to go across to God's country."

"That's good. It's going to belong to the little old U.S.A. What'll your figure be, cap'n?"

"Five per cent," I told him. "That'll be twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Very good, cap'n," he agreed. "It's a good tough price; but I'll come across all right. I reckon the more you stand to make out of it, the more like you are to do your best. And just what that is I guess every Customs official each side of the pond knows. If you do up to your usual, the New York Customs'll never even smell it. That's why I've come to you; and that's why I don't kick at your figure."

"Where's the picture?" I asked him.

"Here!" he said, almost in a whisper, and patted the wrapped-up drawing-board affair that he held under his arm.

"Bring it along into my cabin, and let's have a look at it," I told him. "I want to see this *smile* that won't come off, that I've heard so much about. Is it anything wonderful?"

"Cap'n," he said, with extraordinary

earnestness, "it is wonderful! It's as if one of the old gods had got in some mighty fine work on the panel."

We went along to my cabin, and I shut and locked both doors. Then he unwrapped the thing on the table. I looked at it for a good bit. It was certainly fine and strange.

"It's got something about it that looks as if a clever devil had painted it," I told him. "She's got no eyebrows. That makes her look a bit peculiar and, somehow, slightly abnormal. But it doesn't explain what I mean. It's as if the elemental female smiled out in her face—not what we mean nowadays by the word *woman*, but all that is the essential of the *female*. The smile is conscienceless; not consciously so, but naturally. It's as if the unrestrained female—the "faun" in the woman—the subtle licence in her—the subtle, yet unbridled, goat-spirit in her was spreading out over her face, like a slow stain. It's the truth about that side of a woman that the best part of a man insists on turning his blind eye to. The painting ought to be called: 'The Uncomfortable Truth!'"

"Cap'n," he said, "for a man that pretends not to understand pictures, you're doing mighty well! I guess you've just put into words a bit that I've felt, but couldn't ever get unmuddled into plain talk. Anyway, the chief thing that counts just now, is there's five hundred thousand dollars on the table there; and twenty-five thousand of them are yours the day you hand me the painted lady, safe and sound, in Room 86 of the Madison Square Hotel, New York.

"I guess you've got that all plain, cap'n? Meanwhile, I'll book my passage across with you. I reckon I shall feel easier sleeping in the same ship with her."

"That's all right, Mr. Black," I told him. "If you've got an hour or two to put in, you'll find that chair's comfortable, and that's my brand of whisky in the rack."

"Right you are, cap'n," he said; and while he was making himself comfortable I began to get out my colours, palette, and brushes.

"You paint, cap'n?" he asked, over the top of his glass. He seemed surprised.

I nodded towards the oils and water-colours round the bulkheads. He got up with his glass of whisky, and began to

go the round, sipping and muttering some astonishment as he journeyed.

"My word, cap'n!" he said at last, facing round at me, "you sure can paint some! And I guess I'm slinging no cheap flattery. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to do an oil sketch of the 'Mona' as a keepsake, right now, and before I hide her for the voyage," I told him. I hauled out a sheet of prepared millboard from my portfolio. "I guess I'd like to remember I once handled the original," I went on; "and I'd like to have a shot at that smile. The trick of it catches me."

"Good for you, cap'n," he said, quite interested, and set down his whisky, while he propped up the 'Gioconda' in a good light from the glazed skylight above. Then he came round behind me to watch.

I finished the thing—a rough sketch, of course—in about an hour and a half, and Mr. Black seemed to be genuinely impressed.

"Cap'n," he said, "that's good work, you know. You're a mighty queer sort of sea captain!"

"Mr. Black," I said, as I fetched out my pipe, "you're a mighty queer sort of picture-dealer!"

But he couldn't see it.

April 8th. At sea.

Mr. Black's an interesting man to talk to, but he's got the itch to know where I've hidden his blessed picture. I've explained to him, though, that when a secret *has* to be kept, it's better kept by one head than by any other number you could think of in a month.

Meanwhile, I've found that he's a good taste for other things besides pictures. As he put it:

"Cap'n, I'm no one-horse show in the matter of liking good things. A pretty woman I like, and if she's good, so much the better."

"They're rare," I told him.

"I grant you that, cap'n," he said. "As rare as a high-pressure man with a sound temper. That's why they're worth finding. Well, I like a pretty woman, a good violin solo, a good whisky, a good picture, and a good patron of art. And I reckon the five mean life!"

I smiled, and I said nothing, but when he came up to my chart-room to-day I introduced him to a pretty young American of the name of Lanny, who has made a point

of palling on with me, and has come up to look at my pictures.

When he came in she was criticising my copy of the 'Gioconda,' and after I had introduced him she hauled him into the discussion, willy-nilly.

"I think that's a fine piece of work of the captain's," she said. "But you sure ought to see the original in the Louvre, Mr. Black. Captain Gault's done fine, but the original just gives you shivers all down your spine."

"I've seen it, Miss Lanny," he assured her, "and I agree with you. It's a mighty wonderful thing. But Cap'n Gault don't reckon it's good art."

"What!" said Miss Lanny. "Captain Gault, you don't tell me that?"

"It's not good art, Miss Lanny," I said. "It's true, but it shows the ugly side of a woman's character."

"That's downright insulting, captain," she said warmly. "I reckon it shows what the great artist meant it to show. It shows the delicate subtlety and refined spirituality of woman. There's more in 'La Gioconda's' smile than in the laughter of a hundred men."

"I hope you're right, Miss Lanny," I said—"for the sake of the hundred men."

This talk occurred this morning, and I put the stopper on then, for it was getting a bit too serious. And, anyway, when there's a pretty girl in one's chart-room, who looks as if she's good as gold and chock-full of hell-fire all in one and the same moment, one is apt to get fidgety.

April 10th. Night. Late.

Great excitement; at least, Mr. Black's in a state.

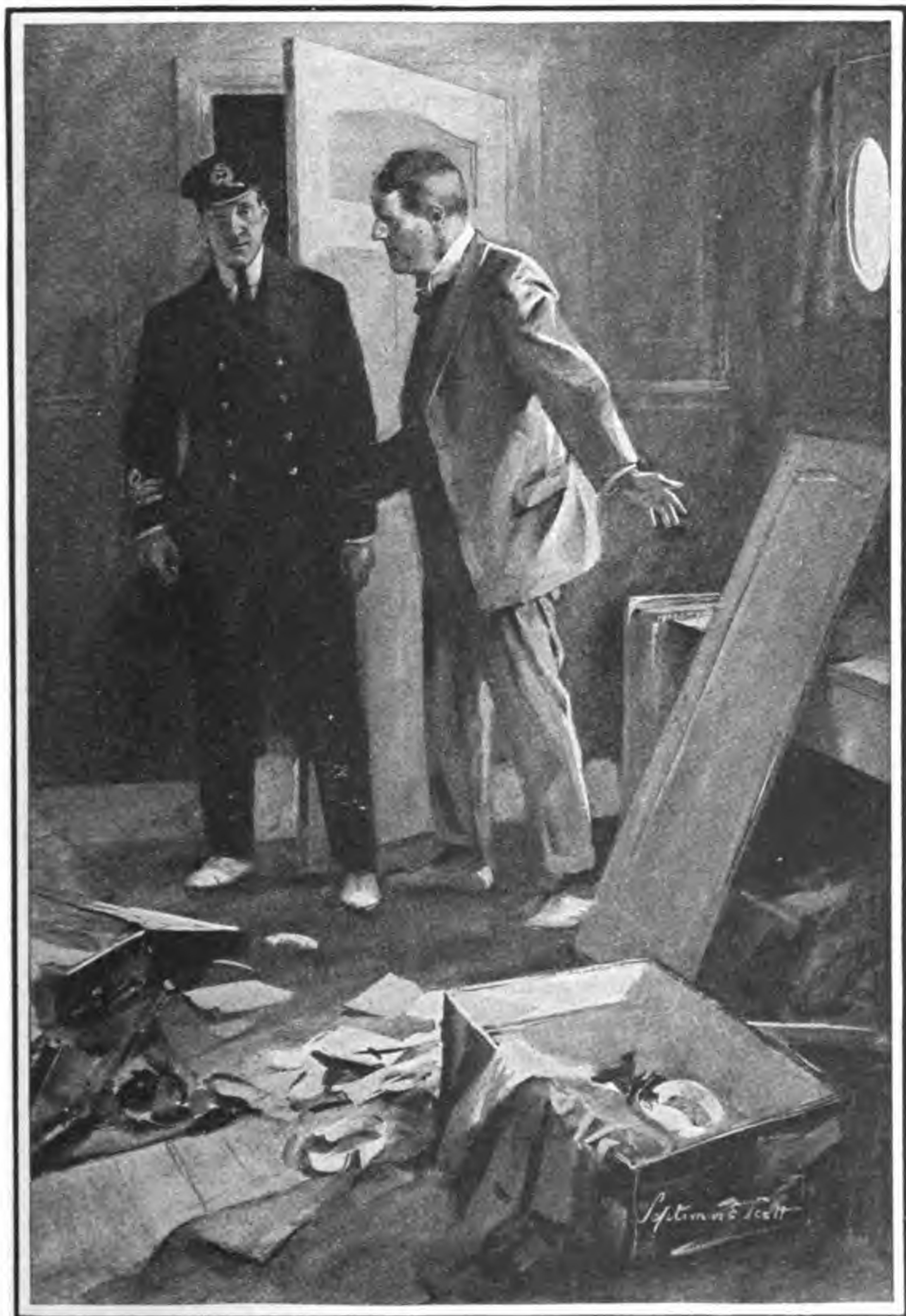
He's spent most of the last two days spooning Miss Lanny in *my* chart-house, while I've made shots at doing sky effects in water-colours.

I call that cool, to try to cut me out with the young lady—though I can't say that she's seemed backward.

However, this sort of thing has to be paid for.

About an hour ago Mr. Black sent word by a steward, would I come along to his cabin? Lord! The mess! Someone, or several, I should think, had been through his place, and left it like a wooden town-ship after a cyclone.

His box lids had all been ripped off;



About an hour ago Mr. Black sent word by a steward, would I come along to his cabin? Lord! The mess! Someone, or several, I should think, had been through his place, and left it like a wooden township after a cyclone.

his bed had been pulled to pieces, and his mattress had been cut open; his wardrobe (he's got a suite de luxe, off the saloons) was ripped away from the bulkhead, and was lying on its side, and the mirror had been broken clean out, and lay on the carpet.

The marble top had been lifted off the washstand, and the carpet had been pulled up in several places, and was ripped across, as if with a pair of shears.

In his dining-room, the Louis XVI. sofa had met bad trouble, and yielded up its springs, much tapestry and the ghost, all at once. The writing-table had its top lifted off, and another table had evidently seen trouble. The heavy pile carpet here was divorced both from itself and the floor, and lay in heaps, literally cut to pieces.

In the bath-room, some of the tiles had been forced out, as if the human cyclone had meant to make sure of what lay below; and in the dressing-room things had equally not been neglected.

I sat down on the wreckage of Mr. Black's bed and roared. He just stood and stared.

"You sure see the funny side of a thing, cap'n!" he said at last.

"This'll pay you for cutting me out with my lady friends!" I told him, when I could breathe again. "I suppose you've been up spooning on the boat-deck, instead of coming down and turning in at a reasonable hour like a Christian."

He looked sheepish enough to please me.

"Providence, Mr. Black," I told him, "is always careful to leave the dustpan on the stairs, when it sees we're getting too 'aughty." Then I got serious. "Missed anything?" I asked him.

"Not a thing yet," he said, "but it'll take a bit of straightening up."

I rang for his servant, and sent a message to the chief steward.

Fortunately the next suite was empty, and we moved Mr. Black's gear into it. Just the three of us; for I want no talk among the passengers, until the trip is finished. That sort of thing is better kept quiet.

The chief steward locked up the whole suite, and we knew then there could be no talk; for Black's servant had not been allowed in to see the place since the trouble.

"Now, Mr. Black," I said, "come along up to my place for a talk."

When we reached my cabin, Mr. Black

had a whisky to pick him up, and we talked the thing over; though I saw he didn't see as far into it as I had done already.

"Anyway," I told him, "you've lost nothing; and now they'll leave you alone. They've proved the thing isn't in your possession. If it had been, they'd sure have had it—eh?"

"Sure!" he said soberly. "Are you mighty certain it's safe where you've put it?"

"Safe till the old ship falls to pieces!" I told him. "All the same, they must be a pretty determined lot, whoever they are; and I expect they'll be paying my quarters a visit if they get the half of a show. By Heaven, I'd like 'em to try it on!"

April 11th. Afternoon.

Mr. Black and Miss Lanny spent the morning up with me in my chart-room. The talk turned on a water-colour I was making of the distant wind-on-spray effects, and I hit out once or twice at Miss Lanny's critical remarks.

"That's pretty good, Cap'n Gault," she said, looking over my shoulder; "but I like your copy of the 'Gioconda' better; though you haven't got the da Vinci ability to peep underneath, and see the abysmal deeps of human nature."

"Dear lady," I said, "may I light a cigarette in your presence, and likewise offer you one?"

She accepted, and Mr. Black also.

"Da Vinci was a great painter," I said.

"I'm sure," she answered.

"But he wasn't a great artist. Understand, I'm judging him just on the 'Mona,' which is the only thing of his I've seen, but which is supposed to be his greatest work."

"What do you mean?"

That was a plain question, and I answered it plainly:

"The da Vinci Johnny was too busy looking out for his abysmal deeps of human nature to remember the heights," I told her. "He was like a painter with his eye glued into a sewer, painting and sweating himself into eternal fame—that is for other perverts like himself; and for the big blind, unmeaning crowd that follows the shouting of the perverts, because they don't know enough to shout tosh frankly."

"Now the value of the 'Mona' must be

put at a high figure, maybe ten million dollars in the *open* market." (I grinned cheerfully at the back of my mind.) "But if it's worth that, it's worth it as a painting—not as a *complete* work of art! It is the product of a twisted art and a very great handicraft."

"It is a perfect work of great and wondrous art!" said Miss Lanny. "I like to see how piffly little amateurs try to teach the master!"

I laughed at her bad temper.

"Dear lady," I said, "you admit my copy of the 'Gioconda' is not so bad," and I beckoned to where I had hung it on the bulkhead, under the skylight.

"By the side of the original," she smiled at me, "it is as a ginger-pop bottle beside a Venetian glass wonder. You've sure got a hearty, healthy conceit of yourself, cap'n! Why, cap'n, you've painted your copy with eyebrows!" she added suddenly.

"Yes," I said. "I like the effect better. I've no use for those abnormal effects. Besides, it's more decent!"

"Goodness!" muttered Mr. Black, "you sure are cracked to-day, cap'n."

"The Mona," I asserted once more, "is a twisted fragment of a woman—the produce of a twisted nature. I understand, I guess, because I'm a bit twisted myself; it's only in odd moments that I can fight down the twist in me, which makes me see every woman worse even than she is."

"There, you see! I can't stop slamming at 'em; not even when I'm out to explain."

I had to laugh at myself; and the tension eased out of the two of them. I had watched the softer look of capable feminine interest supersede the incapable critical light in Miss Lanny's eyes, as I had explained my own shortcomings.

"Cap'n Gault's sure running amuck, every time a woman's on the carpet!" said Mr. Black. "I guess, Miss Lanny, he's like a number of men, he's gone and got fond of a bad 'un; some time or other she's scorched the youngness out of his soul. I know!"

He wagged his head at me.

"The only reason he'll talk about the 'Mona' is because she's a woman, bless her," he said. "But, you know, cap'n, you'll sure have to quit going on the rampage like that, or it'll be getting a habit."

Miss Lanny reached out her hand for another cigarette, and then bent towards me for a light.

"Was she a very bad woman, Captain Gault?" she said, under her breath. "She must have been!" She looked up into my eyes, through the smoke of her cigarette. "I'm sorry you've had that sort of experience of women," she went on, still in an undertone, and still looking up into my eyes. "You ought sure to know a really nice woman; she would heal you up."

"Why?" I asked. And then: "Do you reckon you're qualified to act the part of kind healer, dear lady?"

"I'd not mind trying," she said, still in a low tone.

"Why," I said out loud, so that Mr. Black could hear where he sat, over by the open doorway, "in your way, you're just as bad! You say a thing like that, in a tone to make me think you're a stainless angel of pity and compassionate womanhood, and at bottom you're just another of them! You may be virtuous—I don't say you aren't; I believe you are—but you're up to all the eternal meanness and everlasting deceit of the woman! You come here, posing as my friend, as the friend of Mr. Black, chummy and friendly with us, even to the point of losing your temper, and all the time you're one of a gang of thieves aboard this ship, trying to diddle Mr. Black or me out of a picture you and your pals think is aboard."

As I spoke, she had whitened slowly, until I thought she must surely faint. And she sat there, without saying a word, the smoke curling up from her cigarette between her finger-tips, and her eyes looking at me dumbly and big and dark through the thin smoke.

Mr. Black had stood up and taken a quick step towards me, an incredulous anger on his face, as I had proceeded to formulate my charge against Miss Lanny; but he had checked at my mention of the picture, and now he was staring in a stunned sort of way at the girl. We were both looking at her, but she never moved, and she never ceased to look at me in that speechless fashion.

"You allowed Mr. Black to make love to you last night, late, so that you could keep him up on the boat-deck while your friends ransacked his suite. And now,

as you realise that Mr. Black has not got the picture, you and your friends suppose that I must have it, and you have been directed to divert your valuable attentions to me. If necessary, I don't doubt that you meant to encourage a little love-making on my part up on the boat-deck or elsewhere to-night while an attempt was made on my cabin.

"But I assure you, dear madam, that where a lady is concerned, it has been my rule in life to avoid making one of a crowd. Also, as captain of this vessel, I have facilities for keeping an eye on things which might surprise you and your friends.

"In proof of this, let me mention the names of your gang. They are Messrs. Tillosson, Vrager, Bentley, and finally, Mr. Alross, your husband.

"I had the names of three of them before we had been at sea twenty-four hours, and now I think I may say I can put my finger on the whole lot of you.

"It is quite within my power to cause the arrest of you and your party, but there is no need.

"Neither Mr. Black nor I have any fear of what your friends can do, for, let me tell you, the only 'Mona Lisa' aboard this ship is my own copy, which you see hanging up there on the bulkhead.

"Surely you did not suppose that if Mr. Black has, or had, a valuable picture to transmit to New York, he would advertise the fact to people of your sort by travelling in the same vessel with it!

"That is almost all I have to say. You had better go now. Provided I receive from your party before to-night the sum of one hundred and two pounds, fifteen shillings (which is the chief steward's estimate of the damage done to Mr. Black's suite last night), I shall allow affairs to pass, and your party may land free in New York.

"But, if the money is not delivered before six o'clock to-night, and if afterwards I have any further trouble with Messrs. Tillosson, Vrager, Bentley, Alross or yourself, I shall order the arrest of the entire party, and shall hand you all over to the police when we enter New York."

She had spoken not a single word. Only once had she shown any sign of feeling, and that was when I announced my knowledge of her relationship to Mr. Alross, a tall, thin, blonde man, of quiet manners and an

unhappy skill at cards. Then the hand which held the cigarette had begun to shake a little; but, beyond this, never a sign of the shock, except the absolutely ghastly whiteness of her face. She certainly is a woman of nerve, and good pluck, too, I grant her.

Then she stood up suddenly, and what do you think she said?

"Cap'n, your cigarettes are as treacherous as you seem to imagine all women to be. See how it's burnt me while I was listening to your scolding. I must run away now."

And she just turned and walked out of the chart-house as calmly as if she had just been in for one of her usual chats.

"How's that for some?" I said to Mr. Black. "Let me tell you, man, I admire that woman. She's got the real female brand of pluck, and full strength at that. She's stunned half dead at the present moment, yet she carried it off."

Mr. Black was all questions, and he wanted to know why I told them the picture wasn't aboard.

"I told them what I told them," I said, "in the gentle hope that they may try to believe it, and so not consider it worth while to lay information with the Customs, which is a thing they'd do in a moment, as you know yourself, just to make things ugly for us, and to ease their own petty spite."

"Why not arrest them?" he asked.

"Don't want any unnecessary 'Mona Lisa' talk in New York, do you?"

"My oath; no!" he said.

"And now they know I'm on to the crowd of them, bound to walk a bit like Agag, eh?" I said. "No, I guess we'll have no more trouble with 'em this side of New York. And I bet they pay up within the hour."

April 12th. Night.

I was wrong in one respect and right in the other. The money was sent up to me by a steward inside of half an hour, and I sent back a formal receipt.

But we have not seen the end of our troubles about the picture, for the gang approached Mr. Black quite openly last night, and told him that if he'd let them come in on a quarter share of the profits, they'd hold their tongues and give him all the assistance they could. If he said no,

then the New York Customs were going to get the tip as soon as ever the search officers came aboard.

They told him quite plainly that they knew the picture was aboard, and that they were satisfied I was the one who had it hidden away. But, as they put it to him, it was one thing to hide contraband jewels, like small packets of pearls, of which a hundred thousand dollars' worth could go into one cigar, but that I could never hope to hide from the Customs, if they were put on the scent, a thing the size of the 'Mona,' which, being painted on a panel of wood, could not be rolled up small like a picture on canvas, etc.

They quite worked on poor old Mr. Black's feelings. I guess he may be some expert at picture stealing, like any other dealer, but he's out of it when it comes to real nerve—the kind that's wanted for running stuff through the Customs.

However, I've got him pacified, and I guess he'll manage now to keep a stiff upper-lip. I pointed out to him that a twenty-thousand-ton ship is a biggish affair, and there are quite some hiding-places aboard of her, and that I know them all.

I told him, in good plain American, that the picture would not be found.

"You needn't fear they'll start to break the ship up looking for it!" I told him. "Ship-breaking is an expensive job. Don't you get fretful. They'll never find her where I've put her!"

April 13th. Evening.

We docked this morning, and the gang did their best to do us down.

I reckon they'd guessed I wasn't keen to arrest them; and they just put the Customs wise to the whole business before they went ashore—that is, as far as they had it sized up.

Well, next thing I knew the chief searcher was in my place demanding 'Mona Lisas,' as if they were stock articles; but I disabused him to the best of my ability.

"No, sir," I told him. "The only 'Mona Lisa' picture we're carrying is the one there on the bulkhead; and I guess you can have that for fifty dollars right now, and take it home. I reckon that's a good painting now, don't you, mister, for an amateur?"

But I couldn't enthuse him; not up to

a sale! He was out for big things, it seemed by his talk; so I let him search.

They're still at it, and Mr. Black, last I saw of him as he went ashore, was looking about as anxious as a man who's bet someone else's last dollar on a horse race.

April 14th.
Still searching.

April 15th.
Still searching.

April 16th.

Mr. Black sent a messenger down aboard this morning to ask when "it" was going to come.

I swore; for if that note had got into the wrong hands the game would have been all up. I've warned him to keep away from the ship, and not to communicate with me in any way. I'll act as soon as it's safe.

I decided to give him a heart-flutter as a lesson to be patient.

"Look here," I said to the hotel messenger, and I pulled down the cardboard on which was the copy I'd painted of the 'Mona,' and handed it across to him. "Take this ashore," I told him. "Go to a picture dealer's, and tell them to frame it in a cheap frame, and then send it up to A. Black, Esq., Room 86, Madison Square Hotel, with the compliments of Captain Gault. Tell them to wrap it up well as if it were something valuable. Here's a dollar for you, my son. Tell them he'll pay! When you see Mr. Black, tell him that 'it'—mind you say 'it'—is coming! It is!"

When he had gone, I sat down and roared at poor Black's digestion when he found what "it" amounted to. I guess I'll not be bothered with him now until I'm ready to see him.

April 16th. Night.

I went ashore to see Mr. Black this evening. The Customs nabbed me en route, as usual, and I had a search that would have unmasked and unearthed a postage stamp. But they needn't fear. I'm not carting 'Mona Lisas' ashore in the thick of this hue and cry!

When I saw Mr. Black it was for the first time since he left the ship, and he rushed at me.

"Where is it?" he asked. He looked positively ill.

"Dear man," I said, "I don't hawk the 'Mona' around with me. Perhaps that's what you want"—and I pointed to the copy of the "Mona" in its cheap frame which stood on the top of a bookcase.

"Quit it!" he snapped, almost ugly; but I only laughed at him.

Then I took out my hanky, and a bottle of solution. I took the picture down and put it on the table, wet my hanky with the solution, and wiped the picture over gently but firmly.

The eyebrows came away; also one or two other parts where I had laid my fake paint on pretty thick.

"There's the 'Mona,' Mr. Black," I said; "and I guess you owe me twenty-five thousand dollars."

He looked; then he yelled; yes, he fairly yelled. First his delight, then his questions. I endured the first, and answered the second.

"You saw me paint a picture, didn't you?" I asked.

"Sure!" he said.

"Well, that's in England, for a *keep-sake*," I said. "Afterwards, I took the 'Mona,' soaked her off the board-backing

you had glued her to, and remounted her on cardboard. Then I painted her a pair of eyebrows with fake paint. Also I touched up one or two other parts of the picture, and you and Miss Lanny spent most of the voyage criticising the immortal da Vinci.

"Miss Lanny called him even worse things than I did. She told me, if I remember right, that the painting was like a ginger-pop bottle compared with Venetian glass!

"I think I said he was not a big artist; and as for you, you looked as if you backed up what Miss Lanny said. Altogether, poor old da Vinci had a lot of hard things said against him. And all the time his masterpiece, plus a pair of eyebrows, and some surface polish, was looking down at us from the bulkhead. I offered her to the

Customs officer for fifty dollars, but I couldn't get him to bid.

"Yes, Mr. Black, I've some enjoyed myself this trip. That's what I call doing the thing in style.

"Thanks; yes, twenty-five thousand dollars is the figure. I guess we've got to celebrate this—what?"



A photograph of the original "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci. This painting was stolen from the Louvre in Paris, and is dealt with in the above story.

The Inventor of Meltite

A
COMPLETE
STORY

By
C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

ILLUSTRATED BY C. M. PADDAY

MR. S. J. LIVINGSTONE was not a poor man, but I think he may be described broadly as an ambitious man. He had an air that some people (other than customers) found arrogant.

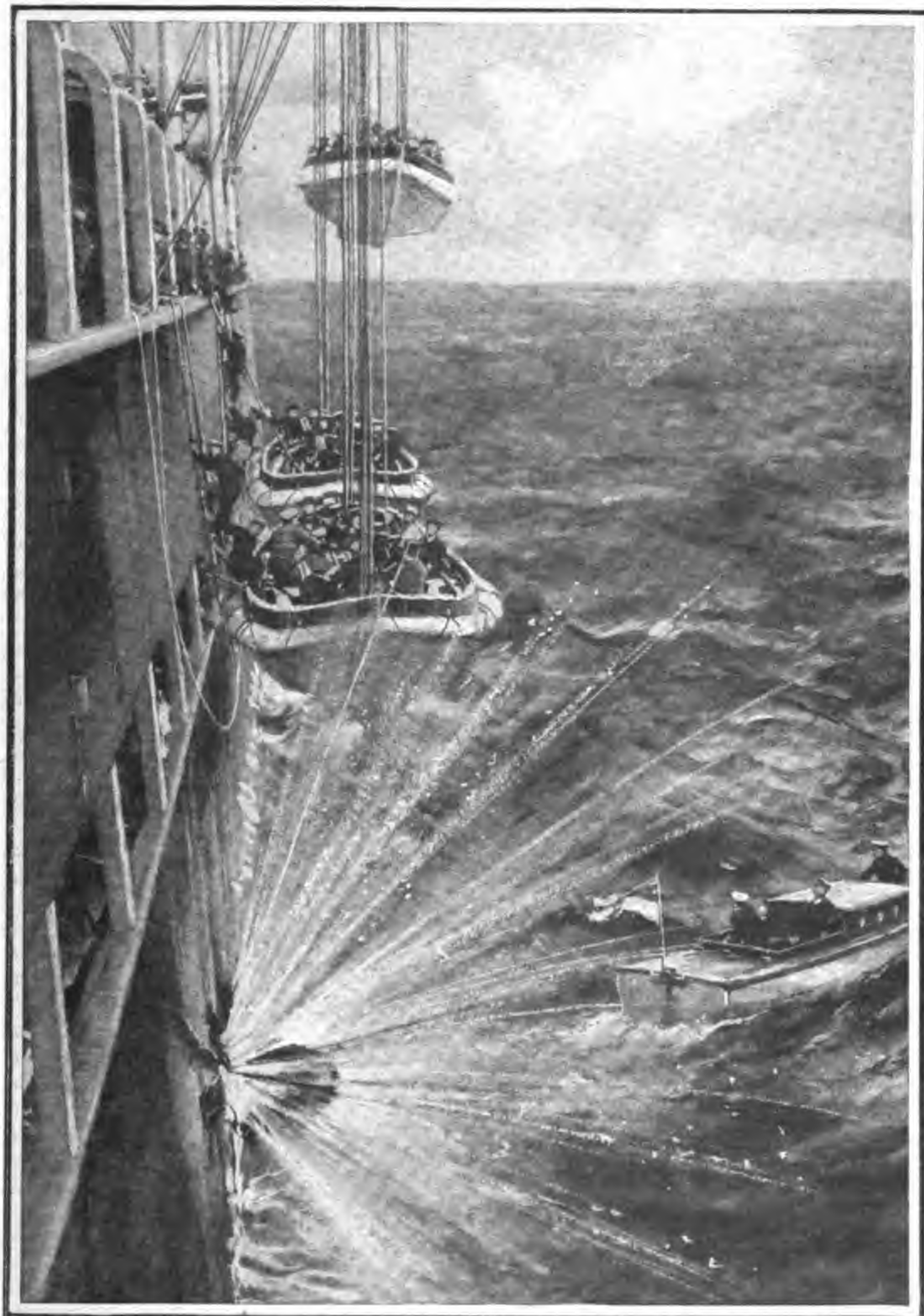
Soon after the War began he tried to hold up the British Admiralty for a million sterling, free of tax, and an earldom; and when this did not come off he crossed Whitehall and tried the same game on the War Office. He got hold of some bland ass there who irritated him into saying more than was judicious, and left the building under arrest. The magistrate before whom he was hauled called in doctors to enquire into his mental state, and was with difficulty persuaded to dismiss him with a caution.

He had not gone to either of these seats of military learning on the strength of his appearance alone. He was a business man, and had no mind to be fubbed off with underlings. He knew it would require one of the Heads to be man enough to give him what he asked for, and he saw to it that weighty introductions carried him direct to a Head—both at the Admiralty and the War Office. The only trouble was, neither Head that he saw was big enough for his job, or S. J. Livingstone would have got what he asked for—or been taken out into the yard and shot before he could talk. For myself, I think I should have shot him, as being on the whole the safer, and certainly the cleaner course. However, perhaps that is a matter of taste. You shall judge for yourself.

But read next a word or two about the man himself. Livingstone, he called himself, and by reason of a birth in Paisley, affected a Glasgow accent, rather of the Pollockshields variety. (This is a cross between cleft palate and German). His father had been Solomon Levenstein, who had exchanged brutal ill-treatment in the Frankfort Ghetto for the doubtful delights of being a rabbi in Scotland. (Conceive a Jewish priest in an atmosphere of Wee Frees, U.P.'s and Episcopalians!) S. J. Livingstone, son of Solomon Levenstein, had never visited Germany, but loathed it and all its contents from the bitter tales of Ghetto persecution dinned into him during his upbringing.

Old Solomon, in his way, was a well-read man; S. J. was a better—mainly in the direction of natural science. I think if somebody had subsidised S. J. and he had specialised in one or two branches of chemistry or chemical physics he might have been something big, though again this is open to question. It is on the cards that when he discovered something good—Meltite, for instance—he would have dropped pure research like a hot brick and struck out boldly for commercial affluence. He was a good deal of a mixture—which is perhaps the same thing as saying he was altogether a Jew. For instance, no outsider would have suspected him of collecting enamels; but he did, lavishly and worshipfully; and told no one, so that prices should not be raised against him.

In commercial life, S. J. Livingstone was



The motor-boat slid away with a spurting, spluttering spray of molten iron pursuing her, and a fine firework effect taking place over her counter. "Good heavens!" said Hillcote. "That fiery stuff is eating the plate away as if it was so much tissue-paper. And aren't those ducks getting out their boats in a number-one hurry!"

a seller of dyewares in Bradford (Livingstone & Co., 29, Chapel Row. Agents for Dresdner Alizerin Gesellschaft. Telegrams:—"Explorer," Bradford). Up to the beginning of the War, he did pretty well, sold a decent weight of goods in his office, and more, after the manner of his kind, at the political club where he lunched, and at the golf club where he kept his liver down to gauge on Saturdays. On Sundays he was invisible. He spent half that day in chemical research—he was chasing a cheaper synthetic indigo—and the other half in gloating over his enamels. No living soul ever caught him at either. Between whiles his housekeeper fed him sumptuously, although he bullied her.

After war began he made money hand over fist. How he ran German dyewares into England without getting dropped on I know, but shall not tell. Probably the Government know, too. The British Government makes a specialty of doing silly things, we all admit, but it is not what the Oriental calls an All-the-time Fool. We all knew the Government wanted dyewares to get into the country for khaki and other things, and presumably the Government knew when to wink. Anyway, Livingstone & Co. were the firm with the goods, which they bought for shillings a pound, and sold for pounds a pound, to S. J.'s delight, and to the noted increase amongst his enamels. It was just after the December balance-sheet he cut out the big Yankee collectors over that bit of old Limoges that Christie's called the Scarlet Madonna. Also he bought twenty dozen Pommery '06.

Then one Sunday morning he blundered upon Meltite by an absolute fluke.

It was untamed enough when he first mixed it, and I gather that he narrowly escaped with life. As it was, he was badly burned, his laboratory in the cellar was wrecked, and the City Fire Brigade had an interesting time salving the balance of the house.

But he was skilled enough at his job, and once he knew the nature of the mixture he had stumbled upon, it was easy to arrange its proportions so that it could be handled in comparative safety. Incidentally the City Corporation helped him. They were using a mechanical mixture of an iron salt and powdered aluminium for welding together the ends of tramrails,

and he studied their methods. The Corporation called their stuff Thermit. There is no secret about it. Thermit is used for a score of purposes, and latterly the ingenious German loads it into his Zeppelin bombs. S. J. Livingstone's mixture was like Thermit, only more so. He added to his powdered aluminium a substance that gave up its oxygen with more astonishing quickness, with the result of producing even more amazing heat than burning Thermit gave out.

After inspecting the fused remains of his cellar, the inventor hit upon "Meltite" as a name for his discovery, and then spent a rapturous afternoon gloating over his enamels, and thanking Allah that he kept them in a fireproof safe. He went to the Seascale links for a couple of days then, and because he was thinking of something else the whole time, played golf extremely badly. But exercise and sea air crisped his brain, and lifted his outlook from the retail view.

Half the world was at war. This was no time for a new Limited Company, and anyway that infernal Treasury would probably stop a capital issue. Besides, if he took out a patent, and published a specification, Germany would jump his claim as surely as mails ran to Rotterdam.

"No," he declared—and smashed a new driver into the turf and sent the head flying. "No, a Government is my mark, and the British is the nearest. The German, of course, would be the easier to handle, but strafe Germany, anyway. The British Government—and keep the mixture a secret till they pay—and then let them work it. Caddy, give me a club that won't break. I think I'll make an iron shot of this now."

Thereafter he sold the business of S. J. Livingstone & Co., 29, Chapel Row, Bradford, to an unintelligent Christian (being very shrewdly of opinion that no more German dyewares would slip through before the end of the war), and settled down to draw out a prospectus for Meltite that would convince even a high Government official.

Shells for naval and military cannon, loaded with Meltite, were the basis of his first idea. On leaving the gun they would be fired by means of an ordinary time fuse, and could (1) arrive as a mass of molten steel—highly recommended for annoyance

to trenches; or (2) could warm up after penetrating armour—a special line this for setting fire to refractory warships.

S. J. Livingstone was not a literary genius, but he was a salesman, and a man that can unload dyewares in Bradford and Manchester can sell anything. His prospectus of Meltite was a gem in its way, and he was justly proud of it. But he did not send it through the post. He got the best introductions possible to the biggest man available at the Admiralty, and took the prospectus in his hand to back up his voluble tongue.

He failed at the Admiralty to make a sale, as has just been recorded, but I know no details. All I could get out of him was that the officials at that office were “a pretty tough lot, but, according to their limited lights, sound.” S. J. did not get his knife into the Admiralty as he did into the War Office, and I think it was more the particular “bland ass” (his term) who received him there than the failure to affect a bargain that got on his nerves. He was always rather an arrogant man with those he considered weaker than himself.

For a moment, after that second rejection with its police-court sequel, he was minded to seek the sure market of Germany. They, at any rate, had no qualms about the methods by which they killed an enemy, so long as they killed him efficiently, and anyway Germans knew enough about elementary science to understand a first-class invention when they saw one. He dined on this, in style, and at the Café Royal, and came out, and shook a fist at darkened London.

“Curse you!” he said to Great Britain. “I don’t care a row of beans about you, but I’m not going to help the blighters who tormented Solomon Levenstein in Frankfort. And I am going to make Creation hear all about Meltite, even if I don’t get paid C.O.D. Afterwards, when you fools here do get wise to what you’ve been offered, the price will be two millions instead of one, with the earldom thrown in as per before. Dirt cheap, too! Only twelve hours’ cost of your blessed war. Then I’ll settle down and marry—yes, marry some real nice girl with a lump of money—and have a family, and try to feel a real Englishman. And I’ll have the best collection of enamels on earth—not on

view to the public, or they’d be raising my income-tax. ‘The Earl and Countess of Livingstone invite you to Livingstone Castle to meat tea, and afterwards to view their celebrated enamels.’ And perhaps we won’t do it in style—I beg your pardon.”

“Not ‘t all,” said the man whose hat he had bashed in. “Just rehearsin’ your speech, I suppose? Or have you been dinin’—like myself? What do you say to joining me in a small glass of particular old fine champagne brandy to keep it all quiet? You’ll have to pay for yourself because of non-treating order, but I’ll pay for myself next round, so that’ll be all right.”

Now S. J. was not in the mood to come down from the clouds and drink brandy with a stranger who had obviously “dined” already, and the stranger was sharp enough to notice this. Said he:

“Don’t strain yourself to come in here if you’re due at the club. But I’m bound to talk to somebody about my yacht, or else I’ll burst, and I thought you’d do.”

Thoughts snapped and sizzled in S. J.’s brain.

“A yacht, have you?”

“Well, I call her that when I want to put on edge. Admirin’ friends describe her as a coffin with the motor too far aft.”

“Thank you,” said S. J. Livingstone. “I’ll come in with you and have that cognac.”

“Come along in then, or some sweet young thing will trip along and ask why I’m not soldierin’, and I shall bring the blush to her damask cheek by explaining how few of my legal set of insides I’ve got left on the premises. You unsound, too?”

“Too old,” said S. J., who was thirty-five. “Turned forty-six, I’m sorry to say, though perhaps I don’t look it. How big’s this yacht of yours?”

“That depends whether you view her with the mellow eye of evening, or run her over with a cold two-foot rule. Just now I could take her round the world with a crew of one, and if there was a German to kill at the far end, I’d take her round twice. Gad, man, I’d give something to be sound! But it’s no use lying to those infernal Army vets. I know. I’ve tried.”

“It must be beastly. Then she’s an ocean-going yacht?”

“Good Heavens, yes, man; though, frankly, she’s a bit damp if there’s much sea

runnin'! But in anything like smooth water, if her sparking plugs are clean, and she's pleased with her mixture, she can kick out eleven—yes, and up to eleven-point eight sometimes, as easy as look at you. And I've just shipped a patent washstand that'll beat the band. Can't leak in-board however rocky the valves get."

"Why haven't you hired her to Government?"

"Because the beasts don't know a soft thing when they see one. She fouled two of their blessed conditions out of eight hundred and forty-three. It was my own patent balance-rudder that floored her finally. They said she'd turn turtle if I gave her a hard-over helm at top speed. Well, so would a loco go smash if you ran it full pelt into the buffers. It's a thing a man doesn't do, that's all. But let's clear out of here! That pretty girl with the gold hat there by the pillar is going to shove a white feather on me. I know it by her thoughtful eye. And I shall be saying something I shall regret to-morrow morning if she does. Have you a club anywhere handy?"

"I haven't a London club."

"Well, I've a pot-house of sorts in St. James's Street. We'll go there. Drat that girl!"

It was a queer and one-sided partnership that was fixed up between Jew and Gentile that night. The Gentile, who was Sir Thomas Hillcote (seventh baronet), hankered after nothing except "a bit of sport with the Germans." The Jew's single idea was to advertise Meltite so noisily that even the British Government must see the need to buy it up at maker's terms.

"Hallo, Tommy!" said a man coming into the club smoke-room. "How's *Drowning Made Easy*? Still afloat?"

"No, I've put her on wheels and made her into an armoured car," said the owner genially.

"Well, call on me when you want a spare shuvver. My neck's my own at present. Nobody seems to want it."

"That's Bell," said Hillcote, as the man carefully picked his way to a chair at the other side of the room. "He's got locomotor ataxy. He and I both crocked in the Navy the same week, and

got fired out by a Medical Board on the same day. Rum, isn't it?"

"Oh, you're a naval gentleman, are you?" said S. J.

"There's another blow. I've got even Navy rubbed off me now, have I? As a matter of interest, was it one of our genial archbishops you took me for? Alack, my fatal gravity of manner."

"Then you can navigate, and all that?"

"I was a most promising officer. Everyone said it of me. It was a thing I couldn't avoid. The First Lord sobbed out that now, indeed, the country would go to the dogs when they lost me. I say, Mr. Isaacs, I mayn't stand you a drink because of the brutal Laws of the Land—Section: Treating. But you may absorb mine when I'm not looking. I've about got my load. My crumbs, but wasn't that a pretty girl with the gold hat?"

"If you carry out my scheme, you could marry ten girls with gold hats."

"Not 't all, my good chap. I'm not a Turk. But, by Jove, I'll tell you what! If you'll let old Tinkle Bell chip in, we'll call it a deal. He's having a filthy time, poor dear, just now, what with pain, and being flinty, and all that, and if he saw a decent chance of being hung as a pirate, or anything in that line (which is what your scheme seems to amount to)—excuse me, Mr. Benjamin, if I'm a bit fuzzy about it—he'd freeze on to it with both claws. By the way, I suppose you are an Englishman?"

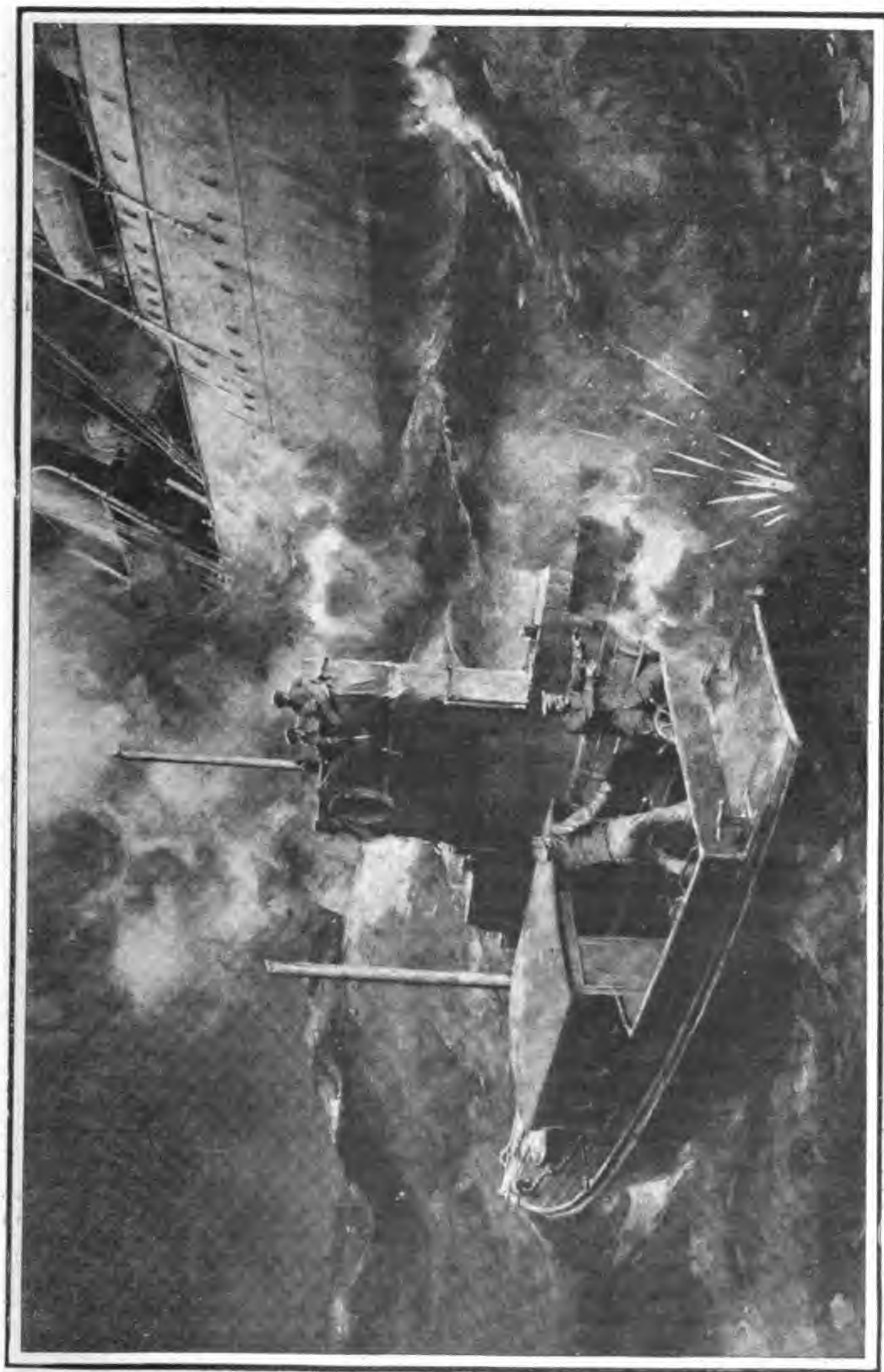
"Rather! Sorry if you thought I was anything else."

"Not 't all. But you will waggle your hands in moments of excitement. Pedigree started in Asia, I suppose. I shall want a bit of proof that you can deliver the goods in the dynamite line you've been speaking about——"

"Meltite."

"Very likely. Never heard of it. I wasn't one of the scientific johnnies. I was merely a salt-horse lieutenant. Well, prove to me and old Tinkle that this blowy-up stuff will eat holes in a ship's plating, as you say, and we'll motor you off to any old point in the North Sea you care to name till we've sunk all the shipping afloat, or run out of bombs, or been strafed ourselves, whichever comes first. Is it a bet?"

"You're just the gentleman I want.



The German submarine quietly stalked them by the light of the burning Swede. Bell did not see her till she was alongside. Then he tried to bolt, and also threw into the North Sea the last remaining Meltite firemaker

Look here; read that! There's a full specification of Meltite."

"Nothing doing, most noble Abraham. I don't care a row of pins for typewritten matter. The letters jump about so. Nothing but the genuine article at work will convince us. Let Tinkle and me see that with a sober morning eye, and we'll get busy with a speed that will surprise you."

Sir Thomas Hillcote's motor-boat does not appear in either Lloyd's or the Yachting Register as *Drowning Made Easy*, but as her real name brings up other memories, it may here be suppressed. Anyway, amongst her intimates and acquaintances she is sufficiently well known by her nickname.

She was the darling of her owner's heart, and largely the product of his lamentable inventive faculties. From her misplaced engines to her ridiculous bow, from her capstan (whose barrel would not bite) to an enormous balance rudder that would have capsized a battleship, she was a museum of enthusiastic ideas gone wrong. Ex-Lieutenant Thomas Hillcote swelled with pride every time she tried to shake him overboard. Ex-Lieutenant Bell was glad to be at sea once again in anything that would float. He had been desperately afraid of dying in his bed these last few weeks, and now, with the low land of the Thames Estuary dropping into the grey seas astern, the fear was easing. There was war and work away through the North Sea mists ahead, and perhaps luck.

"Can you cook?" S. J. Livingstone was asked.

"I never tried. I've always been above that sort of thing."

"Then you've got to learn. You aren't a watch-keeper, and seeing as how we don't carry a crew this trip, you'll have to cook—and cook well, or you'll get the foul side of Tinkle's tongue. When we bring up alongside the enemy you'll be gunnery lieutenant, and you take charge, and we two do as we're told. But till then you're cook, Father Isaac; and as we're bare Navy in the way of drinks, and there's no whisky on board, you're to stand-by with hot cocoa whenever it's wanted. Got that? We'll worry along on cold tin and biscuit for the rest. But we're not going to be done out of our lawful cocoa, and

don't you forget it. You may be sick between-whiles, though what in thunder you're being sick for in smooth water like this beats me! Good Heavens! there's a busy devil of a destroyer buzzing up at about fifty knots, and wasting my country's fuel-oil most scandalously, just to interfere. Here, Tinkle, you talk to her, and tell her we're out after mackerel. Say I'm below, writing to a lady friend who wears a gold hat."

Ex-Lieutenant Bell tried to be formal, but was recognised.

"Haw, haw! You and your mackerel! Glad to see you looking so fit, Tinkle. You'll be back as a giddy brass-edged commander before the week's out. Go easy with that wheel, or you'll twist off Tommy's patent rudder. If you stick to your present course you'll land on to the feather-edge of my fancy new mine-field. You might call me up if they don't go off, and I'll come and set 'em better. You gay kipper, why doesn't *Drowning* carry a pilot? But I suppose that's Tommy. Trust Tommy for running on a graveyard if there's one handy. You bear away four points starboard, Tinkle, and you'll live a lot longer. Keep good."

The destroyer grunted and bucked, and ran away over the edge of the horizon at the speed of a railway train. She spread the news amongst the British sea police patrolling the North Sea, and they in their turn jeered at the motor-boat, and let her through. An important small cruiser wig-wagged "Captain's compliments to Sir T. Hillcote, and he didn't care for mackerel, but would like brace of grouse." An ugly tug, with a three-inch gun stuck through her towing-bridge, hailed through a megaphone that she could supply a stale tinned tongue for bait if fish were not biting freely. A draggle-tailed motor patrol-boat, whose crew all wore forked beards in polite imitation of Admiral Tirpitz, offered to bet *Drowning Made Easy* three gallons of petrol to a pint of lubricating oil she hadn't got more than three cylinders firing at that precise moment—and the bet, for painful reasons, could not be taken.

"We're making a dreadful stir," said S. J. Livingstone once, between spasms. "I'd no idea there were so many British ships about."

"Who did you think ran the North Sea?" Bell asked. "The Germans?"

You've been reading the papers, Uncle Reuben. You're entirely wrong. It's ceased to be the German Ocean quite a lot of months now, and we've taken possession of it ourselves for keeps. Bring me a bowl of cocoa, Reuben, hot and gummy, and mind you don't slop it about on the oilcloth like you did last time. Also bring me of the sandwiches, cold-dog variety, one ; class, non-bendable. I have a twist on me, Reuben, for the first time for three months. After you have completed your important duties as steward, you can stand-by, and get a couple of your torpedoes, or whatever you call 'em, ranged ready for action. We are not exactly on our cruising ground yet, but there's a good thick North Sea fog coming down, and you meet all sorts of funny things in fogs."

"I don't think I can do it," said S. J. faintly. "This beastly little boat lurches so, and I've been so sick, I've no strength left."

The man with locomotor ataxy dropped his drawl, and yapped in the old style of the quarter-deck.

"Carry out your orders! This is war-time! If you don't do as you are told, I will fling you overboard. We've no use here for extra ballast. If you can't do it yourself, I'll take charge of your Meltite, or whatever you call it, and make what I can of it myself."

"You coolly say you'll rob me?"

"Like a bird. Carry on, now!"

S. J. Livingstone found himself doing as he was told. These ex-naval lieutenants at sea were very different people from the thirsty souls he had talked with in a St. James's Street club, and he suddenly found himself scared. The attitude of Sir Thomas Hillcote on the matter clinched things.

"I resent Mr. Bell's treatment," said S. J., as he was bringing aft the ordered cocoa.

"You can resent till you're black in the face," the baronet informed him cheerfully.

"And I shall square up for it when I get home."

"Home! Who's thinking of getting home? We're out here to play games with Germany, with half the British Fleet standing-by ready to interfere. You haven't a cat-in-hell chance of seeing your happy home again, Moses, my dear. You carry on and don't worry about the future, or

you'll meet with present trouble that'll cause you pain. That's a sound tip. Old Tinkle's got the devil of a temper now he's seedy, and he'll break your arm or crack your jaw as soon as look at you if you don't carry out orders smartly. I'll help him if necessary."

Now I don't think S. J. was a coward, but he was first and foremost a business man, and he was beginning to regret very much that he had launched Meltite with these strange associates. His idea, of course, was (with their help) to advertise the stuff and sell it. Theirs was an entirely different proposition. They looked forward to doing the maximum of damage with it—and there their programme ended. They did not anticipate getting back to England. They had no care whatever for the future of Meltite or its inventor. The disgusting part of it was there was no wriggling out of the deal. His earldom, his two millions, his beautiful enamels—

"Below there. Stand-by with those torpedo things. Tommy, bear a hand to do as Reuben tells you. Neither of you is to use a word of English. Hear that, Reuben? If you let out a word of English I'll shoot you like a rat. I'll do all the patter. Understand? And, Tommy, fish out those German uniform caps for the pair of you. I've got mine bent."

S. J. Livingstone went out presently into the cold, foggy air on deck with heavy burdens, and to his amazement saw a German naval ensign whipping and snapping from the motor-boat's jackstaff, and her wheel held by a starched and arrogant German officer in whom he could hardly recognise the late Mr. Bell, of St. James's Street. A steamer of 3,000-tons loomed through the fog, and the motor-boat was edging down on to her on a parallel course.

"What steamboat's that?" The hail went in harsh German.

"Steamship *Rhein*, Rotterdam-Amerika Line, Vanrennan Master, from Galveston for Rotterdam. Cotton loaded."

"Heave-to, and I will see if I must sink you."

"But, thousand devils, captain, I'm carrying cotton I tell you, and it's for Germany."

"That's what I wanted to know. Get out your port boats, and row clear as soon as you like. I'm coming up to starboard."

The Dutch skipper danced on his bridge, but his crew carried out the orders without waiting for him to repeat them. Then Bell put the motor-boat alongside, and S. J. did the rest with the efficient help of Sir Thomas Hillcote.

The charge of Meltite was made fast to an electro-magnet, which was fed by an accumulator of S. J.'s own design. This was not active till it was clapped against a ship's plating, but once there, a switch was automatically thrown in, and the whole affair clung in place like a limpet. Simultaneously a small detonator fired the Meltite.

Drowning Made Easy slid away with a spurting, sputtering spray of molten iron pursuing her, and a fine firework effect taking place over her counter.

"My God!" said Hillcote. "That fiery stuff is eating the plating away as if it was so much tissue paper, and inside the hole things look like a blast-furnace. That's the cotton, I suppose. Aren't those ducks getting out their boats in a number-one hurry? There goes the owner down off the bridge to get the ship's papers before he leaves for home. By gad, look! The deck's catching now. Aaron, my lad, your stuff's big medicine, but it advertises itself a bit too much for my taste. We shall have the British Navy round here with fire engines and first-aid kit in two jiffs, and we don't want to meet them. No, not any. Tinkle, my humble friend, bear away to the cold North for half an hour, and I'll hop below and whoop up the coffee-mill another knot or so."

"You might strike that infernal flag before you go; and, here, take my fancy hat with you."

They fired a second ship that night, copper-laden, and were fired at by a third. The third ship carried a profane Yankee officer on her bridge who had apparently been ruffled by the British Navy in the immediate past, and said he would see all Germans in hell before he answered their questions. He backed up his remarks with a .380 automatic Colt, with which he made remarkably close shooting.

Next day Sir Thomas Hillcote broke down and was put in his bunk.

"I told you my insides were unreliable," he gasped at them between spasms. "Leave me the morphia, and I shall be quite merry and bright. Don't you worry

about me, Tinkle. I'll dream about that girl with the gold hat. You carry on, and Jonadab will help you. Jon's getting quite a second Nelson with all his experience. Oh, corkscrews! that was a twinge. I'd take a cast closer in to Rotterdam if I were you."

"We've only just about enough petrol to get home on," said S. J.

"Who wants to get home, my good Jeremiah? There's lots more mischief to be done out here if all goes well and the British Navy doesn't butt in. Just think: all this stuff into or out of Rotterdam is for or from Germany, and because Germany's got a pull in London, the British Government doesn't interfere."

"That's true enough," said the man who had run dyewares.

"Well we, not being politicians, and knowing what's good for the country, do interfere. That's all. I suppose a lot of pious people will want to hang us for our pains, but till we are hung we'll go on with the missionary effort. Tinkle, get busy. There's a steamer coming. I can feel the vibration of her propeller on my sore liver. No, propellers; she's twin screw. Hop, you lazy scoundrel, or she'll be past us."

"Sir Thomas is bad," said S. J., when they got back on deck.

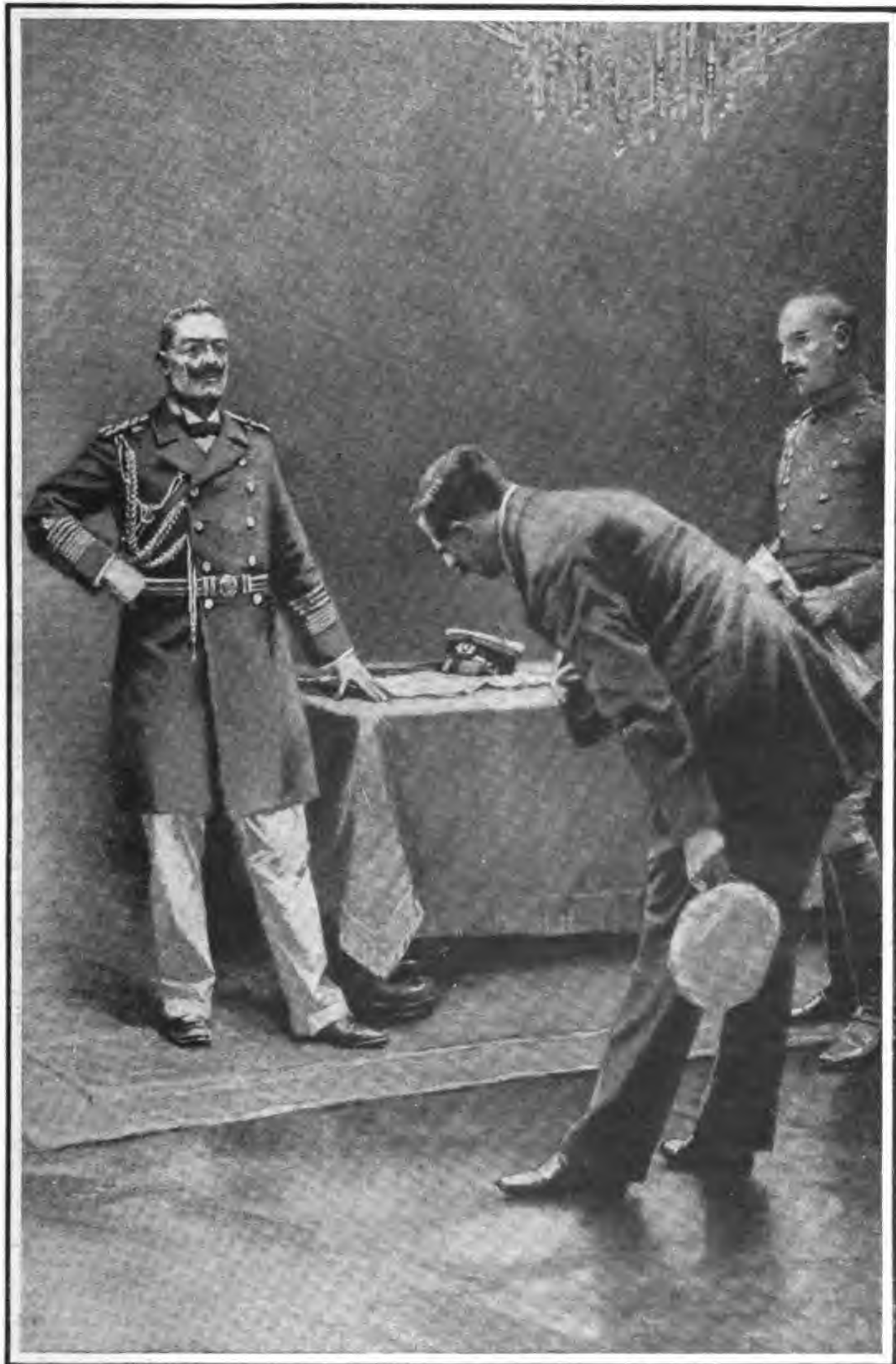
"Have you only just found that out? That new fellow's coming towards us. I'm going to turn round. Mind you don't get shot overboard when I give her the helm! Here! Stay on deck there, you Reuben. You needn't worry about Tommy shooting out of his berth. I'll keep him on the lee side."

Once more ex-lieutenant Bell appeared as the complete German naval officer, and barked his remarks in a foreign tongue. The new ship was a Swede, out of Rotterdam for New York, full to the hatches with German leather goods, dyewares, and chemicals. "Those beasts of English," announced her captain, "are respecting the rights of neutrals this week, whatever they may do next."

"Got good freights?"

The Swede shrugged apologetically. "Well, in war time, illustrious Herr, we neutrals all look to make a little extra bit. Be careful—Himmel! be careful; you will run me down."

"Not a bit of it. I'm not going to ram. It's only a sort of game like 'Tig' we're



At last Livingstone was brought before the Greatest Personage of all. "You have made a great invention in Meltite," he said. "I will give you your price for it—a million sterling and a British peerage."

"My price is two millions—now that Meltite is proved," said Livingstone.

playing. Now then Rube. On the port quarter. Clap on your poultice when I swing her in, and don't get flung overboard if you can help it. Poor old Tommy's patent rudder's a bit fierce. Great Scott, man, but you set that fuse mighty short! You'd better put some oil on those burnt hands before the air gets to them."

"You German beasts," the Swede stormed, "you have set my ship on fire."

"I hope so, Mr. Neutral. Rather pretty effect I call it. To see a big chunk of plating dissolve out into mere sparks and roman candles is astonishingly pretty to the simple sailorman. I should call away your boats if I were you, or you'll get wet feet. Excuse my butting in with advice, but you seem rather to have lost your head, and by the smell, those leather goods you were bucking about are beginning to singe."

Now the night was dark and the night was clear, and it sang with wind; and the steamboat flamed like a torch; and by the rules of war *Drowning Made Easy* should have faded from the scene of her exploit with all possible speed. But the Swede bungled his boat-lowering badly, and Bell could not tear himself away. He bawled advice with an acid tongue, and in the event of the advice not being acted upon efficiently, he stood by to save life.

"We shall be seen here," said S. J., frostily.

"Bound to be. Party in the front seats at the firework show always is spotted by the whole audience. But a man couldn't clear out whilst there was a possibility of those fellows frying unless he was a darn German. I'm sure you see that, Rube?"

"Ye—es," said S. J. Livingstone, and stepped down into the after well and sat there. Something inside him bumped with heavy foreboding.

The German submarine must have come up awash, and quietly stalked them by the light of the burning Swede.

Bell did not see her till she was close alongside. They called on him to surrender. He very naturally turned on his power, and tried to bolt. At the same time he threw into the grey North Sea the last remaining Meltite firemaker, where it burst into torrid flame, and exploded in a volcano of fire and steam. After a careful inspection—a very careful inspection—the Germans shot Bell in six places.

Then they bore down alongside, and made fast.

The boarding party found Sir Thomas Hillcote dead in a bunk below. He had bitten through his lower lip because he did not wish to call out and disturb his two shipmates on deck who were trying to give a lift to the British Empire. They examined S. J. curiously, enquired his name, and, on hearing it, transhipped him with politeness.

One of the officers leaned over Bell, who was very nearly gone. "Ha, I thought I knew you. We met once at Kiel, if you remember, at the regatta. I'm sorry, but it's the fortune of war."

"Don't apologise," gasped the man with locomotor ataxy. "I've got to windward of the Admiralty—this trip, and died in my boots—at sea. At sea! I've—had—luck."

Down below in a clammy cabin of the U-boat, S. J. Livingstone found himself treated with a curious courtesy that after a while began to chill. It flashed upon him that cannibals might be similarly courteous to a missionary that they proposed to—well—attend to later. These German officers knew his name, the style of his firm in Bradford, the nature of his proceedings at the British Admiralty, his rejection by the "bland ass" at the War Office. They mentioned that eminent officer's name, and could imitate his manner. They even knew about S. J.'s taste for enamels, and had a catalogue of his more recent purchases. It was all most uncanny. They gave him his favourite Pommery to drink.

They knew all about the powers of Meltite, and recited to him a list of ships destroyed and a description of what they looked like as they burned. It was all very accurate and scientific and un-nerving. An outside observer would have noticed one curious change in S. J. He was not the least arrogant now, either in manner or look. I don't say he cringed, but—well, there was a change.

They even, in a wooden way, got on to his pedigree.

"You are not English? No!"

"Certainly I am. My name is Livingstone. Unless you call it Scotch."

"Livingstone? Ah, but before you changed it? What?"

S. J. kept a sullen silence.

"Answer me. Was it not Levenstein?"

"Yes," said S. J., and felt his self-respect oozing from him.

"So! And now you are going to tell me—pleasantly, and without pressure—how Meltite is made?"

"I do not know. I forget."

"So? Then I hope you like chlorine. Because, until you remember, I shall put you in the compartment with our accumulators, which just now are gassing, and there you will perhaps recover your memory before it is too late."

But S. J. Livingstone came of a race that in the past had had teeth pulled rather than draw cheques which they did not consider lawfully due, and he coughed, and spat, and choked, but parted with no formulæ. He was pretty far gone when the U-boat ran into her home port, but he showed not the smallest signs of yielding.

The Germans were eminently business-like. S. J. Levenstein, dead, was no use to them. Alive, he was full of Melinitic possibilities. So they kept him alive, and alternately treated him well and vilely. He was interviewed by small personages and great, all of them in uniform, some of them polite, most of them overbearing, some of them proffering gifts, many of them offering threats; but to all of them he was unyielding. He might be this Levenstein they were talking about. He might have heard of Meltite. But, anyway, at the moment he had forgotten the composition of Meltite, if, indeed, he had ever heard it. They could not budge him past that, by either kindness or cruelty.

At last he was brought before the Greatest Personage of all, a tragic, twitching cripple, and he set himself out to charm.

"I understand, Mr. Livingstone, that you were a Prussian by birth, a British subject by early upbringing, and are a

cosmopolitan by taste. Well, it is our loss, because you are a man of ideas. But I am not going to quarrel with your choice. You have made a great invention in Meltite. You see, I am not going to belittle it. And if I say it is great, it is great. You offered it to the London Government. They, being fools, as I have shown many times already, refused it. I believe they did not even refuse it civilly. You have stated your price—a million sterling and a peerage. I will give it you."

"My price is two millions, now that Meltite is proved."

"Two millions be it. I do not quibble over marks about a thing I intend to get."

"There is also the British peerage."

"I can buy that for you, too—as I have bought for money down other British titles for my people when I wanted them."

"Very well, sire," said S. J. Levenstein. "Get me from the politicians an English earldom, and give me two million British pounds sterling, and I will give you the formula for Meltite."

"That shall be arranged," said the Greatest Personage, and S. J. was taught by his guide how to back out from the Presence.

There the matter rests for the present.

S. J. Levenstein (or Livingstone) resides in dignified seclusion and security in a Prussian castle full of enamels, whilst arrangements are being made to pay him his price. They feed him on the richest food he cares to order, and he may bathe in Pommerly '06 if he so desires.

But there is one very sound reason why the Germans will not succeed in buying Meltite.—George V., King of England, grants titles; he does not sell them.



Photo: Hugh Cecil

Miss Iris Hoey.



VANITY IN THE STONE AGE.

MR. HEATH ROBINSON REVEALS THE ORIGIN OF WOMEN'S CORSETS.



"DO YOU BELIEVE IN GHOSTS?" CHUDD CHALLENGED, BANGING HIS FIST ON THE TABLE. NAILED DOWN BY A DIRECT QUESTION, DIMSDALE SMILED AND SHOOK HIS HEAD. NO; BUT I DON'T DISBELIEVE, EITHER. I'M NOT ANXIOUS TO BE CONVINCED. THERE'S A ROOM IN THIS HOUSE THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE HAUNTED, BUT I HAVEN'T PLAGUED MR. CHIGNELL TO LET ME SLEEP IN IT."

The Mystery of the Sealed Carret

ILLUSTRATED
E. VERPILLEUX

A COMPLETE STORY
By
A. M. BURRAGE

PUNCTUALLY at ten o'clock—for the new policeman was not yet to be trusted—Billy Chignell went through his nightly ritual of crying "Time, gentlemen!" in tones ranged between brisk joviality and reluctant severity. When he had ushered the last customer out into the night he put up the heavy bar and walked upstairs into the smoke-room.

He had four "guests" sleeping under his roof that night, which, considering that the time of the year was early spring, was something approaching a record. Few visitors came to St. Fay, save in the summer, and most of those preferred the charms of the great new hotel, with its "desirable situation" on the headland near the golf course. Most of the men

who came to spend a night at the Schooner Inn were commercial travellers, and two or three in the course of a week was about the average number. Now chance had brought three all at once, and besides these there was Mr. Dimsdale, who had been there a fortnight. Mr. Dimsdale was a leisured, cultured, and extremely pleasant person in the late thirties, who cherished a delusion that there were trout in the upper reaches of the St. Fay river, and spent his days trying to catch them.

Billy Chignell, good sociable soul, liked nothing better than a glass and a chat in the smoke-room after hours with anybody who might be staying in the house.

He entered unobtrusively and sat himself on a chair near the door, for the four were engaged upon a discussion which had already waxed hot. Dimsdale, vaguely suspected by Billy Chignell of being a scholar and authority on most things, sat on a horsehair chair with an elbow resting on the table. His lips were set in a faint smile, which the landlord interpreted as a sign of suppressed amusement. Walters, a serious little man, who was something of a mystic and compelled by hard fate to vend frivolous articles beloved by womenfolk, sat simmering in a mild rage. Beside him, but a little to the rear, sat Dorley, the representative of a firm of wholesale haberdashers, smirking openly. He loved to see Walters under the lash of another's tongue, but lacked the wits himself to administer the lash. Chudd, who travelled for a firm of brush manufacturers, sat in the largest armchair and laid down the law with all the vigour of a man who relies upon noise and persistence in an argument rather than upon his own reasoning powers.

"It makes me sick," he was saying—"right down sick, it does. How ever children, let alone grown men and women, can believe such fiddle-faddle beats me. Everybody who believes in spiritualism ought to be in a lunatic asylum, and those who go about trying to kid other people ought to get two years' hard for it. That's what I say, and I don't care who hears me say it. Ghosts—spirits—bah!"

He was a big man was Mr. Chudd, with a very red face and neck. For the rest he was a blatant self-opinionated person, with hardly sufficient bovine intelligence to be aware that he was a bully.

The situation was perfectly clear to Billy Chignell before he had been ten seconds in the room. Little Walters, in the hope of starting some quiet and amicable discussion, had remarked how much talk of spiritualism one heard nowadays, and ventured his opinion that "there might be something in it." This had brought Chudd down upon him like a hundredweight of bricks, and he had proceeded to dispose of the denizens of the spirit world, using heavy sarcasm alternately with his table-thumping methods of reasoning. Dorley, with nods and half-words of encouragement, had egged him on, and Walters was having very much the worse of it, because Chudd, having much the louder voice, would not allow him to speak. Dimsdale was sitting quiet and saying nothing.

Billy Chignell disliked Chudd, who was noisy and would not brook the opinion which did not exactly coincide with his own. He did not think highly of Chudd's intelligence. For one thing, Chudd did not come from London—only from Bristol—and he was therefore not entitled to speak with the voice of authority.

Billy Chignell was a little disappointed to find that Chudd held the same views as himself. Not being a lawyer, he was unable to argue successfully against his own beliefs. He was, however, tolerant on the subject. If people wanted to believe in ghosts and such-like—well, they were welcome. One of his rooms was supposed to be haunted, and the stories which had reached his ears were strange and disturbing. He was inclined, lazily, to suppose that there must be some quite simple and natural explanation. He did not believe in ghosts, but he doubted his own courage, and so he had taken the line of least resistance and shut up the room. It was hardly ever needed.

"I've only just come in," he remarked, "but I'll lay Mr. Chudd's been weighing in with some mighty heavy arguments against ghosts and spirits. I don't suppose any'll dare show themselves now."

The delicate shaft of sarcasm glanced off the thick skin of the bagman. Dimsdale, the angler, however, took advantage of the pause to enter into the discussion.

"Mr. Chudd," he said, "hasn't favoured us with any arguments. We have heard

him bang the table and shout and behave offensively, but no gems of reason have fallen from his lips. He has said Rubbish, and Bosh, and Nonsense, all of which are emphatic as an opinion, but unconvincing as an argument."

Billy Chignell grinned delightedly, thankful that Chudd had found an antagonist who could take his measurements. Little Walters laughed and plucked up the courage to say:

"Yes, saying Rubbish and Bosh don't prove anything, Mr. Chudd."

Chudd's face flamed redder than ever. He was the natural enemy of men of Dimsdale's type. He conceived his intelligence to be the greater, but he had not what he called "the gift of the gab."

"Proof!" he cried. "It don't want proof. If you said that two and two made five instead of four, it 'ud be rot, but nobody could prove it was rot, except by their own common-sense."

"Oh, I see—that's the difficulty." Dimsdale's voice was as smooth as milk. "You are going by your own common-sense. But surely you don't expect other men to rely on your reasoning as an infallible guide. For instance, one of our leading scientists, one of the cleverest men in the land, is a confirmed believer in the things your intelligence puts to scorn. You may be a cleverer man, but I never heard of you before I met you, and if I had to pin my faith to one or the other of you I could not pin it to you."

His speech ended in a mild uproar. Little Walters was bouncing about on his chair. Dorley, who observed that a greater man than Chudd was in the field, shamelessly changed sides and joined in the laughter. Chudd struggled to make his voice heard above the din, but for once in a way it was he who was shouted down.

"Yes," he cried, as soon as he could make himself heard, "and that man's as mad as a hatter."

"Because he disagrees with you?"

"No, because he—he—everybody knows he's mad."

Dimsdale shook his head slowly and regretfully.

"No," he said, "you have talked for a long time and been very rude, but nothing in the shape of legitimate argument has crossed your lips. Everybody does not believe—much less know—that that dis-

tinguished gentleman is mad. I am sure he is not. He may be a self-deceiver, but that again requires proof. You don't believe in a spirit-world partly because you think it beneath your dignity as a sober, hard-headed man of business to inquire into anything that sounds to you so childish. You don't want to believe in such things."

"And half the people who do believe only believe because they want to. All the people who say they've seen ghosts, or had talked with the dead, are liars—those that aren't mad."

Dimsdale smiled.

"Yes," he said, "I'm afraid the worst enemy to the spiritualist is the liar. There are a lot of people going about who say they've seen ghosts, when they don't even imagine they have. They believe in such things and they want to convince other people. It may happen though that certain pig-headed people have had strange experiences which they won't talk about because they don't want to believe. Seeing isn't believing to a pig-headed man."

Chudd sat upright and leaned a little forward.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" he challenged.

Nailed down by a direct question, Dimsdale smiled and shook his head.

"No——"

"Well, then, there you are."

"Not at all. I don't disbelieve, either. As a cautious man I take the middle course. I'm not anxious to be convinced. There's a room in this house that's supposed to be haunted, but I haven't plagued Mr. Chignell to let me sleep in it."

"A haunted room? In this house?"

Dorley and Walters repeated the words, and all eyes were turned upon the landlord.

"No there aren't," he muttered. "Aren't no such things."

"Of course there ain't!" Chudd cried. "Which room is it, boss?"

"Not the one where the murder happened?" Walters inquired.

"It's shut up now," said Chignell. "I don't believe in ghosts, but there are folks who do, and I've got my living to make."

"Did anybody see anything there?" Dimsdale asked.

"I dunno—there was complaints."

"Complaints? What of?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. All imagination,

I dare say. But there was complaints, so I shut it up. I can't afford to have people complaining in my house."

"What's this about a murder?" Walters inquired eagerly. "I didn't know there'd been one here."

"It was some years back, just before I took the house," Billy Chignell explained. "A skipper it was. He'd just come ashore and he took a bed here for the night. It seems he'd had trouble with some of his crew—lascars and black men and such-like. Anyhow, he was found dead in bed in the morning—strangled! They never caught the man."

"He must have been in this house the whole time," Dorley exclaimed.

"No; they reckoned he'd managed to hide himself in the Black Horse, opposite, and crawled across from one window to the other. With the streets narrow, like they are here, and the upper storeys nearly meeting overhead, anybody could do it. The skipper had locked his door overnight, and it was found locked in the morning."

"P'r'aps Mr. Chudd 'ud like to spend the night there," said Walters, grinning.

"I wouldn't mind."

"No," said Chignell. "I don't want any complaints."

"I sha'n't make any complaints."

"I think Mr. Chudd should certainly sleep there if he wishes," Dimsdale put in. "I wouldn't myself, because I don't disbelieve in ghosts."

"Afraid!" said Chudd.

"Not necessarily. I don't go about in search of danger and discomfort, that is all. But you, as you definitely disbelieve, have nothing to fear."

He looked sharply at Billy Chignell, who was preparing to utter a protest.

"I hate suggesting that our worthy host should be put to any trouble," he continued, "but it would be a matter of only a few minutes to have bedding put in that room. And if Mr. Chudd is really anxious

"I am," said Chudd, and he meant it.

The man was honest enough. He was quite convinced that he had nothing worse than a damp bed to fear. Give him a dry bed and he would be all right.

Billy Chignell hesitated. He had had complaints about the room, but he did not believe that it was haunted. He could not see of what advantage it would be to give

Chudd the opportunity of crowing like a gamecock over the breakfast-table and pouring fresh scorn on the credulity of weaker mortals. However, it was obvious that Dimsdale wished it. Dimsdale was watching him now, anxiously, appealingly. He found it hard to deny Dimsdale anything.

"All right," he said, "you can sleep there if you want, Mr. Chudd. Only you won't forget I did warn you that people have made complaints about that room."

II.

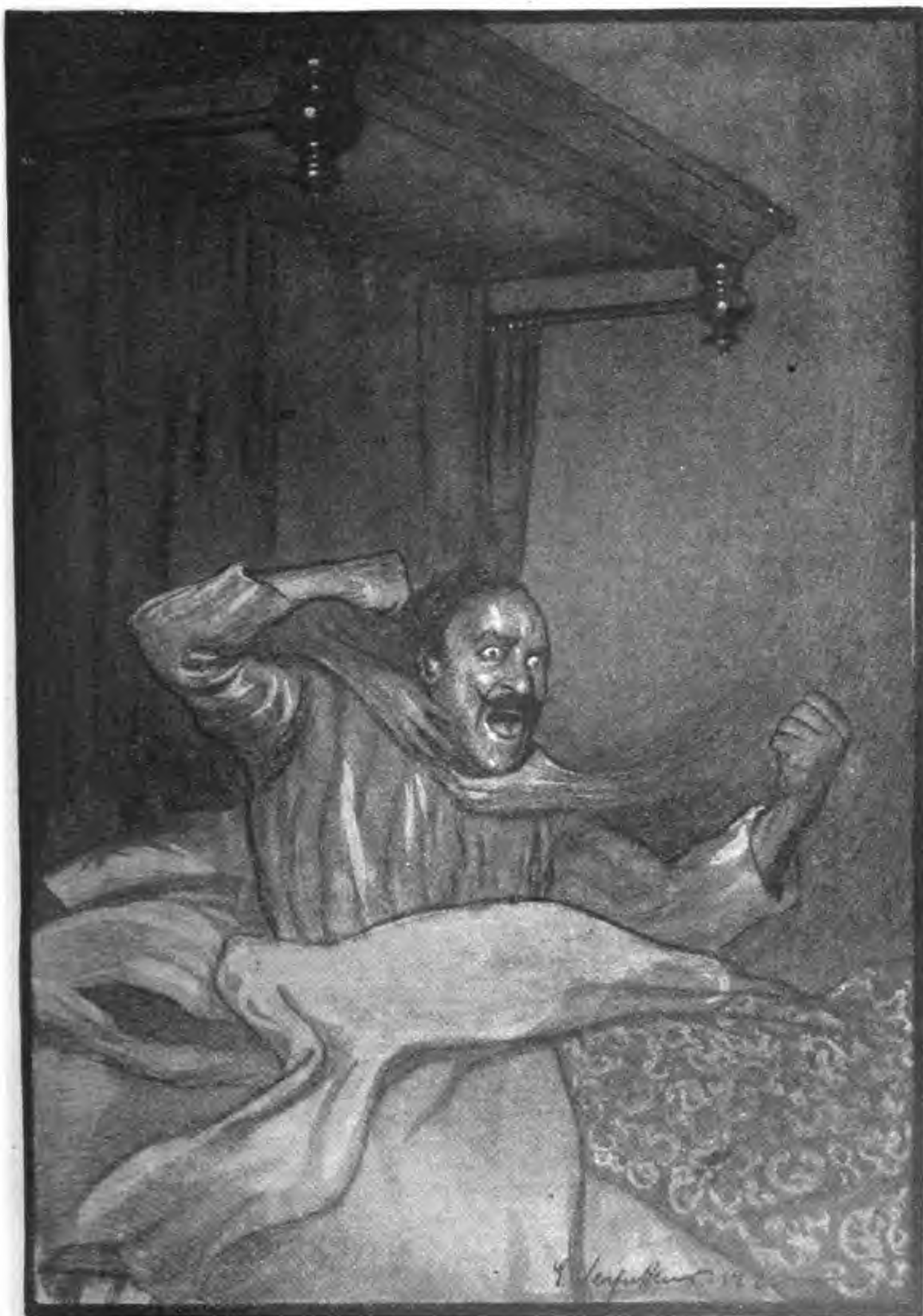
The room of evil repute assigned to Chudd proved to be a cheerless and damp-smelling garret. It was in the old part of the house, which means that portion which had escaped the hands of a previous owner with a passion for renovation and reconstruction. The floor was on a slant and the ceiling hung absurdly low—so low that a tall man had to remember to bend his head as he passed under the long beam on his way to the dressing-table.

The one window faced another window in the house opposite, and the two were so near together that, by leaning well out, one could easily touch the outer sill of this opposite window. The thoroughfare below was so narrow that an automobile could hardly squeeze through, and the upper storeys of both houses projected, after the picturesque fashion of a mediæval architecture.

Chudd held this to account for the air of depression—something more than that of mere desuetude—which seemed present in the room. It had never had, from year's end to year's end, one glimpse of the sun. The house opposite shut it out as completely as if no window were there at all. No wonder nervous and imaginative people had suffered in such a room.

He whistled as he undressed in order to convince himself that he was no nervous mouse of a man. But he did not whistle long, because the atmosphere of the room seemed unresponsive. This feeling he found difficult to analyse. It was a little as if he had made questionable jokes in a company which declined to be amused and eyed him coldly. There was no company present in this case, but he seemed to have aroused some chilly and baleful consciousness.

"It's like singing comic songs in a vault,"



HE UTTERED A HARSH, GURGLING CRY AS THE FINGERS TIGHTENED ON HIS WINDPIPE IN AN AGONISING GRIP. AS HE WRITHED BENEATH IT, THE STRENGTH OF TEN CAME TO HIS AID. HE LUNGED OUT, GRUNTING WITH THE EFFORT, GREAT SMASHING BLOWS WHICH STRUCK THE EMPTY AIR.

he reflected, a little while after he had ceased whistling. "A chap doesn't want to believe in ghosts to get the horrors in this room. If the sunlight could only get in——"

To do him justice, he was perfectly unafraid. He was barely conscious of the slight weakening of his nerves—a mere nothing. He put down that, such as it was, to the brief story of the murder. Ugh! Easy to imagine a murder happening there. His mind, slightly more alert and imaginative than usual, conjured up an ugly picture of the sleeping captain, lying on the very bed which he was about to enter, and some ugly shape, which had come out of the night, bending over him and crushing his throat with hooked, claw-like fingers.

Before getting into bed he closed the lattice window, although ordinarily he was a great believer in the virtues of fresh air. He told himself that the room was already cold enough, and that the draught between the chimney and the door was sufficient to keep the room healthy. At the back of his mind he could not help remembering that it was through that same open window that the assassin had crept to strangle a man lying where he was going to lie.

The room was very dark when he had blown out the candle. The house opposite which shut out the sun by day, shut out all but a fitful glimmer of the dim moonlight. He looked long and intently, but could not see the window clearly, only a faint dimness which grew slowly beyond the posts at the foot of the bed.

"If anybody tries any tricks with me," he thought savagely, clenching a great fist beneath the bedclothes, "I'll smash 'em!"

It somehow comforted him to remind himself of his strength and manhood, although he would have denied that he stood in need of comfort. Three or four long minutes he lay, trying to define the shape of the window; then he turned over and lay on his side and tried to compose himself to sleep.

But that night sleep, which was usually so responsive to his wooing, played the jade with him and mocked him from a distance. He turned from side to side, restless and out of temper, and continued to toss and turn until——

Quite how it began he did not know. Perhaps it was no more than a creaking

board which began that unreasonable nervousness which seemed to grow in him as quickly as the mango tree of the Indian juggler. Somewhere in the room a board did creak. There was nothing unusual in that, of course, and a hundred causes might have been assigned to it. Chudd, however, could not think of one. Lying there in the dark it did not seem right to him that a board should creak unless somebody trod on it. No, no; he wasn't afraid, only——only what made it creak?

He turned over in bed, and the board creaked again, as if in response to his movement. The breath he drew tingled and felt cold in his nostrils. His eyes were closed, and he had to summon resolution before he could open them. Perhaps the captain had heard that board creak——

His open eyes encountered nothing but the empty darkness and he breathed relief. Deciding that he must force himself somehow to go to sleep, he turned over once more. The board creaked again. This time he felt his heart beating, and one ear, pressed against the pillow, heard the loud, quick drumming of an artery. Damn that creaking board! If that wasn't enough to give a man the horrors, what was? It was as if there were somebody in the room——somebody who turned to look at him every time he moved on the bed. An unpleasant thought, that! To himself he fiercely denied that he was nervous, but he did not move, although he wanted to turn over again. Also, it was entirely his own affair if he chose to breathe more gently; it did not mean that he was afraid of attracting the attention of anything that might be taking cover in the darkness. Besides, there was nothing there.

He lay still until the posture tortured him; then he turned again. This time the board did not creak, but its not doing so, perverse enough, increased his discomfort. It seemed to prove that it was not his movement on the bed causing a slight pressure on the boards which had made the sound. He drew a long breath, and the board creaked again then, as if the sound of breathing had attracted unwelcome attention.

Chudd became conscious of feeling slightly damp. In the stillness he fancied he could hear something——something more than the blood singing in his veins. It

sounded like a chorus of voices singing—a very long way off, low, but terribly distinct. All imagination he knew, but—— He clenched his hands. He could not now disguise from himself the fact that he, Alfred Chudd, was nerve-ridden and afraid, and for no reason that the Alfred Chudd of normal times would accept for a reason. The breath came from his lips in a thin trickle of vapour, as if he released it grudgingly.

He lay and sweated, feebly battling against the invading waves of horror, and too engrossed in staving off a nightmare panic to curse himself for owning the weakness, which he had despised in other men. It was not merely the creaking of a board which had brought him to these straits, but because he was conscious—although not through the medium of any sense that he could name—of the presence of some horror, a vague, nameless beastliness for which there was no description in any human language.

Heavens! What was that! His heart bounded within him like a live thing, and every nerve in his body made for him a separate agony. That was no piece of imagination—that noise, that movement at the far end of the room. While his pulses still raced, he realised the meaning of the sound. The window had opened and was swinging in the night breeze that moaned along the narrow streets.

The window had opened! Yes, and when he had shut it before getting into bed he had tried its firmness and been satisfied. It had taken pounds of pressure to shift it, but it had shifted. A strong draught invaded the room and breathing over his pillowed head cooled the sweat in his hair. The window had opened as—O God of pity!—as it had opened that night the captain—— No, no, he wouldn't, he daren't, think about that.

The seconds lagged and became periods of eternity. He knew that his normal self would have risen and closed the window, but he dared not move. The least movement—even of a hand or limb beneath the bedclothes—seemed to attract the resentful gaze of countless unseen eyes out there in the darkness. If he got out of bed, surely they would all come clamouring around him.

In the midst of all the stealthy restlessness that seemed to be going on in the

room, his hearing—or some other sense—made him aware of some other sound or movement that was definite and purposeful. Someone—something—was creeping towards him from the direction of the open window, slinking, huddled and crouched, along the carpet. Chudd was now wet through with sweat. He felt his hair stiffen and rise.

"This is nightmare," he told himself; but in nightmare one cannot move, and Chudd was able, only he dared not.

But the climax was yet to come, and it came long moments later when something cold touched his cheeks and deftly and gently felt its way down to his windpipe. His tortured brain knew it to be a clammy hand with long bony fingers. They fastened on to his throat and broke the spell which had kept him lying still as a felled log. With his ecstasy of terror came the fighting courage of the cornered rat.

He uttered a harsh, gurgling cry as the fingers tightened on his windpipe in an agonising grip. As he writhed beneath it the strength of ten came to his aid. He lunged out, grunting with the effort, great smashing blows which struck the empty air. He tore the hands from his throat, and, with a snarling scream, struck again and again. Half rising, he lashed out like a madman, and toppled off the bed on to the floor in a huddle of bedclothes. His head struck the handle of the door as he picked himself up, and a moment later he had flung it open and half tripped, half staggered across the landing, trailing blankets and sheets behind him.

There was a horsehair sofa in the coffee-room; there was also an oil lamp which might be lit. He made his way there, and remained with a light burning until dawn was in the sky.

III.

Alfred Chudd's appearance was such as to attract attention when, rather late, he made his appearance at the breakfast-table. He looked pale and hollow-eyed and worse tempered than usual, and he kept his chin well down over his collar. Billy Chignell was in the room as he entered, the landlord having just brought in a fresh supply of bread-and-butter for the three already seated.

"Good-morning, Mr. Chudd," he said,

turning half round. "I hope you slept all right."

Chudd grunted an affirmative.

"No complaints about the room, I hope?"

Chudd, although not looking directly at them, was aware of four pairs of challenging eyes focused upon his face. He hesitated only for a moment. Now that the sun was shining into the coffee-room it was possible to conceive himself to have been the victim of a nightmare. Besides, the humiliation of telling his story was something not to be borne.

"No complaints," he grunted.

"What?" exclaimed Dorley. "You haven't seen the ghost?"

"Ghost be hanged!" exclaimed Chudd, in quite his old manner. "If I'd been a madman or a liar I might have seen fifty. But I knew nothing would happen in that room, and nothing did happen. Pity I'm moving on to Bodmin to-day, or I'd sleep in it again and welcome."

It did him good to talk in that vein, and as he continued the breakfast-table shook beneath his fist, and the room became highly uncomfortable for Mr. Walters.

Dimsdale, who had been the first to come down to breakfast, was the first to leave the table. He went downstairs and into the outhouse at the back where he kept his rod ready jointed and his creel and tackle. Some march browns needed tying, and he came out into the light to thread the "points." Billy Chignell, emerging from the back door to shake a mat, saw him, dropped the mat, and made towards him. He was doing his best to grin and look severe at the same time, and his round, jolly face was oddly distorted in the effort.

"Doesn't it beat cock-fighting?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper. "There's that there Chudd, he won't eat his words and he looks nearer dead than alive. He's had an awful night, and he won't say a word. If he doesn't believe in ghosts now——"

"I rather gathered from his shouting," said Dimsdale, wetting the end of a point and holding a little brown fly up to the light, "that he was still rather more than sceptical."

The landlord's voice became a thought more serious. There was a note of respectful rebuke in the tone of it.

"Oh, Mr. Dimsdale," he said, "it's been

a rare lark. But you shouldn't have done it."

"Done what? Dash it, my sight's getting very bad, or I'm very clumsy this morning."

"Come, now, Mr. Dimsdale, sir, it must have been you. Dorley and Walters wouldn't have dared. It beats me how you knew what the others complained of, for I know I didn't tell you. But I could tell what had happened to Chudd, although he did keep his chin well down. I could see the marks on his throat—bruises—all black and blue."

Dimsdale lowered the fly and stared at Billy Chignell.

"Are you suggesting," he asked, half laughing, "that I went to that fellow's room last night and nearly throttled him?"

"I don't suppose you meant to nearly throttle him. But he won't forget it in a hurry."

Dimsdale gazed at him in blank amazement.

"Well," he said, "I swear I never went near his room."

Billy Chignell stared harder than ever.

"And I swear I didn't," he said, "and I'll take my solemn dying oath that Walters and Dorley didn't."

They continued to stare at one another. The sunlight was very bright and warm and seemed to deny what was in their minds.

"The others," said Billy Chignell, sinking his voice, "all complained of the same thing. Somebody came in the night and tried to choke 'em, so they said. I didn't believe it, and I'm not going to say that I believe it now."

"Nor am I," said Dimsdale, and added, after a pause: "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it? I'm a plain man and I don't believe in ghosts or haunted rooms, and I don't want to. But I've got my living to get, and I can't afford to have people making complaints in my house, so I'm going to shut that room up again right away, and people can go down on their knees before I let them sleep in it again. As a plain man who doesn't pretend to understand some things—and doesn't want to—don't you think I'm right?"

"As another plain man," Dimsdale answered, "I'm rather inclined to think you are."

The Ghost Ship

A COMPLETE STORY

By HENRY HOLT

ILLUSTRATED BY
LEO BATES

SEA dogs, they were. The old-fashioned type that is fast disappearing in this era of steam when men no longer learn to be sailors by holding on by their eyebrows to topsail yards in a gale of wind, and clawing at the frozen canvas of a wind-jammer while she is punching her way round Cape Horn. Fifty-three years before, a doting mother had called them David and Jonathan respectively, because they were twins, and it was her fond hope that they would cling together all through life.

"You see, Ned," she explained to her husband then, "this is the seventh time we've had children, and I was a seventh child, too, so they ought to be more to one another than most."

And during those fifty-three years there had been a strong bond between them. The vicissitudes of life at sea had kept them apart a good deal in their younger days, but as they grew older and found blood thicker than water, that bond began to knit them more closely together. At the age of forty, each had a trading ship of his own, and to further their business interests, they pooled their affairs and became partners. Sometimes it was David King who made a particularly prosperous voyage, while his brother, Jonathan, had barely cleared expenses. Sometimes the position was reversed. But the average was good, and their families in Kent were never in want, for the King twins had, in their small way, become men of substance. That is to say, they always had a balance in the bank, enough in the ship's safe to pay cash for a cargo of copra or anything

else that looked good, and they owed nothing.

Lately they had been running merchandise out to Beira, on the coast of Portuguese East Africa, for a London firm, and picking up whatever freight they could for the return trip. David, in the *Firefly*, had discharged at Beira, and was ready for the homeward run. Jonathan, in the *Dolphin*, had just arrived there.

Beira is not exactly a haven of refuge for the afflicted. A man may die in that place with amazing swiftness, and any number of routes to the hereafter are open to him. Generally gin is a factor, but if one misses yellow jack or sleeping sickness, starvation is always waiting, with greedy maw, for those who are luckless.

The King brothers were leaning over the rail of the *Firefly*, when a man came aboard and walked aft. He was fever-ridden, and little more than a skeleton.

"Can I speak to the cap'n?" he asked.

"What d'you want?" David inquired sharply. Strangers whose raiment consists mostly of holes are too numerous in tropical ports for them to be regarded as interesting curiosities.

"You're a Britisher?" asked the man. David nodded.

"Want something to eat?"

"I do, please. Afterwards there's something I'd like to tell you."

Half an hour later, replete—indeed, suffering from repletion—he did what he could in return for the hospitality. There was a plum waiting to be picked up, he said, at Tarak, a little way up the Umbesi River. A trader named Jensen had come

into possession of certain things that were worth a pile of money. Somebody would snap up a rare bargain if he navigated the lower reaches of the Umbesi and dropped his mud-hook in the river off Tarak. Spices there were, red gum copal, stink wood, mahogany, some crocodile skins, and, most precious of all, a goodly collection of ivory tusks.

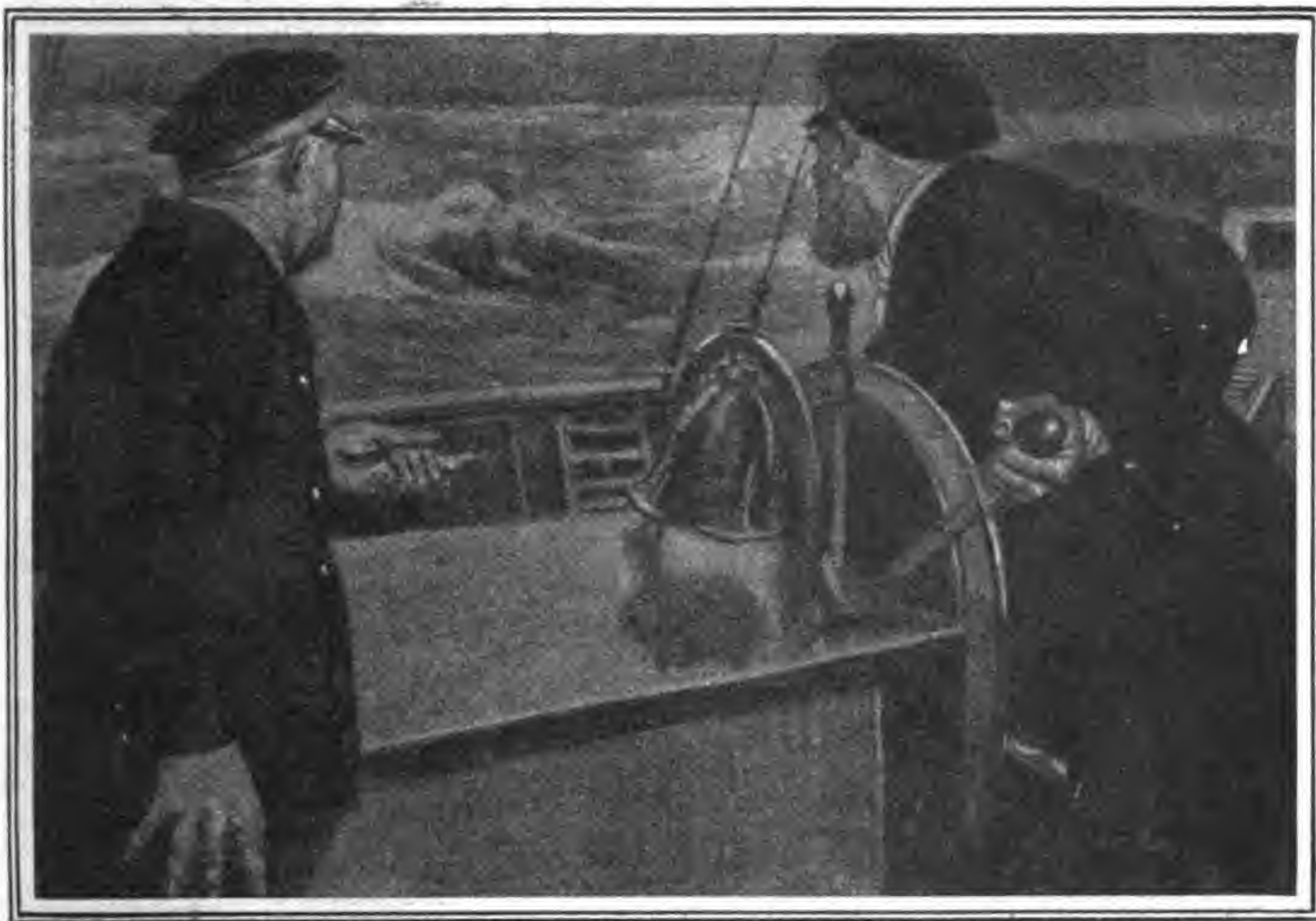
The price of an ivory tusk at a place like Tarak, and the price of the same thing in London, are wholly different matters.

of them much given to conversation. Thoughts had a trick of leaping from one to the other in uncanny fashion.

"You've been coughing a lot lately, Dave," Jonathan said. "Takin' anything for it?" He had his own suspicions, amounting almost to conviction.

"Oh, I've seen a doctor. He's given me some stuff. Plenty o' fresh air is the main thing."

David knew his days were numbered. What the number was he did not know,



"CRAIG," SAID JONATHAN, NONE TOO STEADILY, "WHAT IN BLAZES IS THAT OUT THERE?"

CRAIG LOOKED HARD INTO THE MOONLIT NIGHT, AND THEN STARED BLANKLY AT JONATHAN. "THERE ISN'T ANYTHING AFLOAT WITHIN SIGHT," HE DECLARED.

Crocodile skins, too, and rare spices, are tempting.

Navigation up the Umbesi was, theoretically, impossible. But with a cool head, an infinity of patience, and dogged determination, you may sometimes squirm a small barquentine into peculiar places. And the prize was worth trying for. The *Firefly* drew six inches less water than the *Dolphin*, and, moreover, she was at liberty. So, with a full safe, the *Firefly* sailed.

Just before she left, Jonathan put a question to his brother. They were neither

but he guessed it came down as low as three or possibly two figures.

Jonathan looked into his brother's eyes—looked into his very thoughts.

"Are you all right for this trip, lad? Won't you let the mate take charge o' the *Firefly* and sail with me?"

"Don't you worry. I'll manage. G'bye."

They were both the least emotional of men, but Jonathan, after turning away to go over the side, stumped back to David and shook hands—which was an odd thing

for him to do, because shaking hands was not a habit with them.

Guarding the entrance to the Umbesi River, there is a low reef upon which the surf of the Indian Ocean pounds eternally. Of the two channels into the mouth of the river, either may at any time be blocked by shifting sands. David King took not only his own life, but the lives of everybody on board, in his hands as he manœuvred the barquentine past the bar. Then, with a fair wind astern, just enough canvas to make steerage way, and a man ready to let go the anchor any instant in case of trouble, he crept up the marigold-scented river, until the *Firefly* reached Tarak.

Two days later David had Jensen's things under the hatches. He had to empty the safe entirely to obtain the goods, but they were worth it. Never in all his trading days had he struck such a rich find. The crocodile skins, alone, would have made the trip up the river worth while. But it was the ivory tusks that rejoiced David's heart. Every one of them was over eighty pounds in weight, and some were much more. The skipper had them packed away in the fore hold, under his own eyes.

"I'll be glad," he remarked to Franklin, the mate, "when we land that little lot safe in England. It seems almost too good to be true."

With boats out a-starboard and to port, ready to tow the *Firefly* aside when she began to "smell the ground," the barquentine dropped down the stream, grazed her keel twice on the sand, and finally emerged beyond the reef into the open sea, safe and sound. Her nose was turned to the south'ard, and the long run for home began. The *Firefly* was an old-timer, built by men who took a pride in their skill. She was made of teak, with a green-heart lining, sharp at the bows, with a broad, elliptical stern.

There was one noticeable peculiarity about her rig. While her main and mizzen masts had a pronounced rake aft, her foremast was perfectly upright. The idea was that she might sail closer up to the wind that way, and it certainly was often said of her that she sailed like a witch. Incidentally, that upright foremast enabled anyone who knew the ship to identify her miles away.

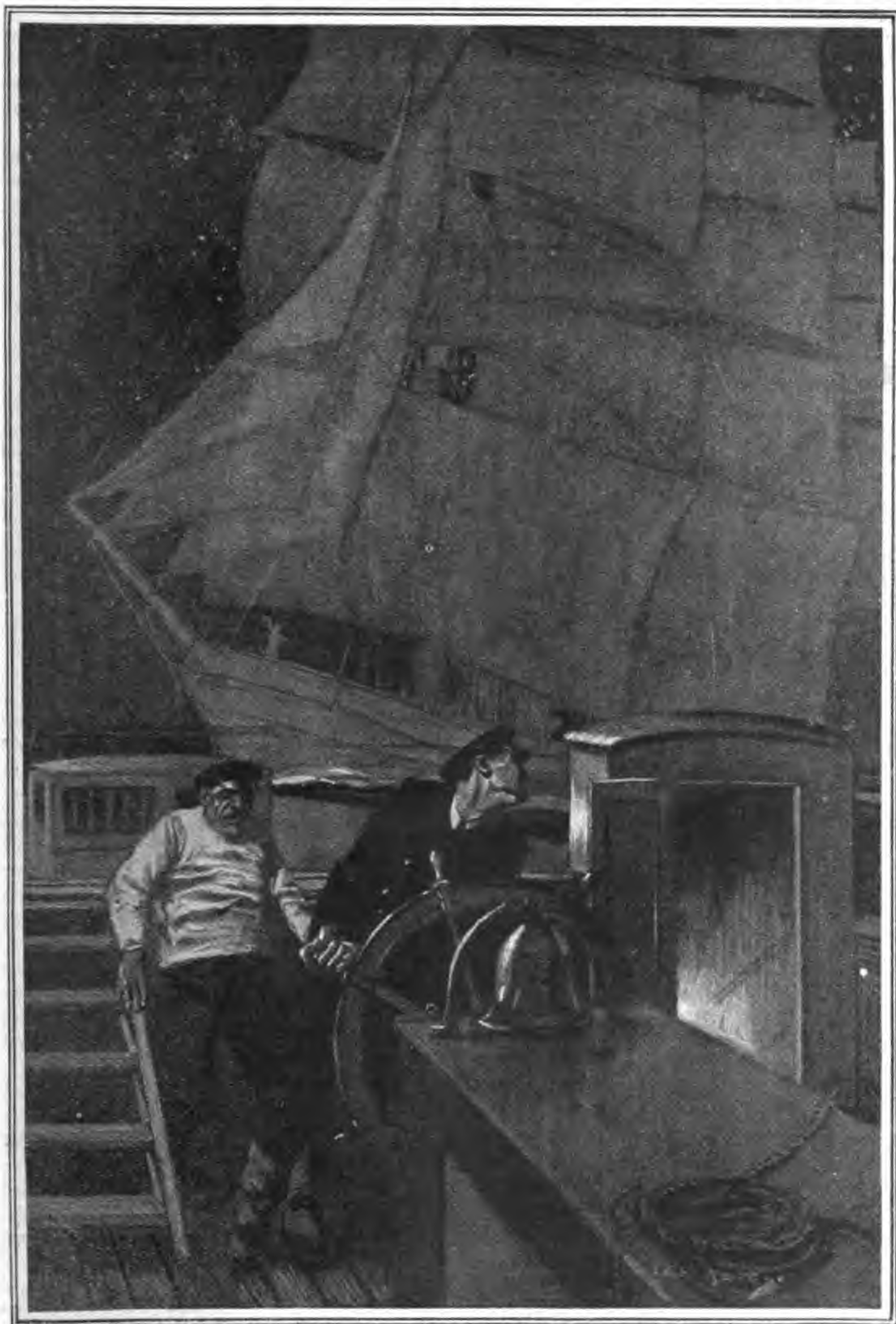
The *Firefly* made one call only on the way home. That was at Port Elizabeth, where the vessel stopped for supplies. Then David King plunged his ship into the broad Atlantic, and his cough grew more troublesome. The trade wind favoured the barquentine for three thousand miles or more, but the skipper began to fail fast. They were abreast of Cape Verde by the time that he knew his chances were gone of setting foot on British soil once more. However, death at sea was good enough for a sailor, and he reflected that the ship would be perfectly safe in Franklin's hands.

But five hundred miles to the nor'-nor'-east of Cape Verde a knife penetrated Franklin's back and he choked convulsively for ten seconds only. The man who killed him, a giant Swede, named Skelken, immediately took possession of the ship, and explained to David King that he could either navigate them to some place in the West Indies or join the mate. The crew's plans were all cut and dry. Many a trader in the West Indies would leap at the chance of buying those ivory tusks and other treasures. Either the captain or the mate had to be kept alive, as nobody else on board knew aught of navigation. Franklin's fate had been decided upon unanimously—he was powerful and a fighter.

There was a cask of rum on board from which rations had been served on occasions. The crew—a swarm of gaol-birds, accumulated from various ports—promptly broached the cask, and there were Bacchanalian revels on the deck while the barquentine yawed and twisted at her own sweet will. And while every mother's son who had signed on the ship was past caring what happened so long as the rum held out, the first blast of a coming hurricane hurled itself upon the *Firefly*, whose every sail was set. Presently, the mother of all winds swept like an avenging angel towards the barquentine. When it had passed on, the *Firefly* righted itself. Her poles, however, were stark. She drifted on the surface—helpless.

Skelken stood swaying, trying to collect his wits. It had been a narrow escape. He took a little more rum to steady his nerves, and then, fighting drunk, stormed his way to the skipper's presence.

Twice he bellowed at David King, and



IN A FEW SECONDS THE GHOST SHIP WOULD DASH INTO THE "DOLPHIN." WOULD SHE CRASH, OR WOULD SHE GO RIGHT THROUGH? JONATHAN WAS SPELLBOUND.

"MY GOD!" YELLED THE MATE SUDDENLY, LEAPING FORWARD TO THE WHEEL, AND TURNING THE SHIP ROUND ON HER HEEL.

then found there was now no living soul on board who knew how to navigate the ship. The skipper had slipped his cable.

Apart from untoward circumstances, the *Firefly* should have reached the Thames within a week of the time the *Dolphin* berthed there. Jonathan King would not have been surprised had the *Firefly* arrived with the news that her captain had been buried at sea. But she did not turn up within a month of her schedule, and Jonathan put to sea again without hearing anything except that the *Firefly* had called in at Port Elizabeth on her way home. After that she had never been reported. Jonathan went off on another voyage, returning to England months later. The loss of the funds which David had carried away from Beira in the *Firefly* came near to crippling Jonathan, but he was less concerned about that than about the mystery of the *Firefly's* disappearance. And so, also, was David's wife. Even if the ship came home, David could hardly be alive by this time. Mrs. King had been with her husband when he went to the specialist and heard the death sentence pronounced.

"Still," said David's wife to Jonathan, "I'll never rest, even when my time comes. He's been my man for thirty-three years and I want to know."

"You'll know, Anna, some day," replied Jonathan.

David's wife looked at him queerly.

"How can that be, now?" she asked.

"The ship is two hundred and forty-seven days overdue. She's gone, foundered, or something. Ships don't come home when they're as late as that."

"I didn't say the *Firefly* would come back," replied Jonathan. "Don't see how she could. But, mark my words, Anna, some day we'll know what happened. I couldn't tell you just what makes me say that, but I'm as sure of it as I am that you're sitting there."

That night he sailed for Barbados and picked up a full cargo for London again. On the seventh day of the homeward run, the *Dolphin* was headed nor'-east, in a straight line for the English Channel, with a fair wind. Jonathan stood on the poop, watching the sun sink behind the western horizon like some gigantic, glowing meteor. The day's heat had carpeted the ocean with a thin mist, which drifted lazily in

patches before the breeze. The stars were brilliantly clear, and a young moon gave promise of her radiance. Jonathan, puffing moodily at his pipe, leaned against the weather rail, sometimes glancing forward mechanically.

Suddenly he removed the pipe from between his teeth, rubbed his eyes, and peered again into the vague mists away to starboard. Craig, the mate, standing by his side, observed the skipper's action, and shot a glance ahead.

"Nothing there, is there?" asked Craig.

"N—no, I s'pose not," replied Jonathan. "And yet just for the minute I did fancy I saw something. It's funny how the mist will fool you, but there isn't any mist, except low down, near the surface. And even then it doesn't amount to much."

The skipper spoke no more of it, but he remained there for hours, smoking meditatively, and looking away to starboard now and again. The impression had been momentary, but vivid.

It was the second dog watch again. The growing moon shimmered on the gently undulating sea, pricking the surface with a million dancing fairy-lights. Not a feathery wisp of mist floated in either direction. Jonathan was pacing the poop slowly. It was a perfect night. Eight paces aft the skipper walked, then eight forward, with the regularity of an automaton. For perhaps half an hour this continued.

Eight paces aft, and he turned, facing to starboard. Jonathan King stood as though transfixed.

Not a thousand feet away, heading due north, there was a barquentine. She remained visible long enough for Jonathan to rivet his attention upon her, and then the arc of water was blank again.

"Didn't I think so! Didn't I think so!" he muttered.

"What d'say, sir?" queried the man at the helm.

"I didn't speak," replied the captain. "Binns, you can't have been asleep. Where's your eyes been the last five minutes?"

"Straight ahead, sir," replied the helmsman.

"Well, look to starboard. You don't see anything—a ship, I mean?"

"Why, no, sir," said Binns, his eyes

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darting everywhere. "There isn't nothin' there."

"I know there isn't," agreed the skipper. "I was only asking."

Eight paces for'ard. Eight aft. Eight more for'ard.

"But what I would like to know," Jonathan muttered to himself, "is this: has Binns gone blind, or have I gone crazy?"

It was in the second dog watch, also, on the following night, that the skipper gripped the mate's arm suddenly, his fingers like a steel vice.

"Craig," he said, none too steadily, "what in blazes is that out there? Heading due north."

The mate's eyes half closed as he scanned the distance for some dot on the far-off rim of the sea.

"Blowed if I can see anything, cap'n," he replied. "And I've pretty good sight, too."

Jonathan still gripped the mate's arm.

"Right beneath that bright star," he said. "Open your eyes, man! Can't you see anything?"

Craig eased his arm from the captain's fingers.

"What d'you mean? Low down on the horizon?"

"No, close up. Four cables' lengths away."

Craig rubbed his eyes with his knuckles, frowned, stared hard into the moon-lit night, and then stared blankly at Jonathan.

"There isn't anything four cables' lengths away. There isn't anything afloat within sight," he declared.

"I know there isn't," agreed Jonathan. "I was only asking if *you* could see anything."

"Why," observed the mate, puzzled, "how could I see anything if there isn't anything there?"

"That's what bothers me," replied Jonathan, leaving Craig to flounder. For a time the mate tried to seek some abstruse meaning in the skipper's words. Then he wondered vaguely whether Jonathan King was all right. The skipper had shown no signs of peculiarity. Mentally, he was keen and alert, as usual. Craig decided to spend a few extra hours on deck occasionally, not because he had any very definite fears, but just to be on the safe side.

Meanwhile, the captain had relapsed into stony silence. All was clear out to starboard. Whatever had been there was now swallowed up by the night. Jonathan did not even raise the question in his own mind as to whether he had, or had not, seen a barquentine. What he wanted to know was, *why* had he seen it? And why had it always appeared in the same place, heading north, at an angle from the *Dolphin's* course? Was it some warning of an impending collision? There could be no earthly reason, otherwise, for the *Dolphin* to turn north. The icy shores of Greenland lay up yonder, with nothing save the wide ocean between. But, each time that ghost-like ship had appeared, it had been more distinct, it had been nearer, and it had taken longer to fade away—as though something or somebody were becoming more insistent.

On the fourth consecutive evening, Jonathan King paced the poop in the second dog watch. There was a fair breeze, so fair that the *Dolphin's* canvas tugged at the already taut ropes. The mate stood abaft the wheel, leaning against the taffrail. The moon was now flamboyant, and the milky way was as a searchlight streaking the sky. Not a speck of cloud hovered anywhere.

Jonathan King kept glancing away over to starboard. There was nothing there—yet. It was uncanny, waiting. The ghost ship was coming. He knew it. He *knew* it. And perhaps, this time——

His hands suddenly clenched. There she was, not a cable's length away. She was just drifting along, but *heading north*. Slowly, very slowly, she drew off at an angle. For perhaps five minutes Jonathan King stood motionless as a statue, watching. He was groping in his mind for the meaning. To swing the *Dolphin* round and run for Greenland would be to have his own sanity questioned. Then in a flash the ghost ship disappeared. Jonathan turned to resume his restless pacing, and there, on the starboard bow, was the barquentine, still heading due north, but in such a position that the course of the two ships must cross in a few minutes. She had two rakish spars. The foremast stood bolt upright. Though the *Dolphin* made but moderate progress, the ghost ship was tearing through the water like a race-horse. Every sail was taut as she heeled

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over. Two little waves shot up where her sharp prow cut the sea. Behind, a long wake of phosphorescent foam stretched. And someone was standing on the poop, beckoning—a man in a peak cap, a man whose figure could never be mistaken. Jonathan recognised him just as surely as he had recognised the ship.

The rushing *Firefly* was now only a hundred feet away. In another few seconds she would dash into the *Dolphin's* bow. *Would* she crash, or would she go right through? Jonathan was spell-bound.

"My God!" yelled the mate suddenly, leaping forward to the wheel, thrusting aside the helmsman and turning the ship well round on her heel.

Then, still clinging to the spokes, he peered over the stern with a puzzled expression.

"You saw it, too, eh?" said Jonathan hoarsely.

"Saw—saw what?" answered Craig. "There isn't anything there! An' yet, just for a minute, I could have sworn something was looming up right under our starboard bow."

"What did it look like? A steamer?"

"No. More like a ship's sails. I only just seemed to see it while you could say 'Knife!' an' I jumped to that wheel dead sure we were in for a smash-up."

The mate manœuvred until the *Dolphin* lay with her prow pointing due north. Straight ahead of her, Jonathan saw the ghost ship, riding easily now. *The Dolphin* was following her!

"Never mind, Craig," said Jonathan. "Keep her as she is. From now on we're going to run due north till I give you a different course. And put a man on the fo'c's'le-head. It's clear weather, but I'll have a look-out kept. Night and day, Craig. You understand. If anything should be reported, call me immediately. It doesn't matter what it is."

"Right, sir! But what under the almighty sun was it that made me turn the ship round? It must ha' been something, because you as good as said you saw it yourself. 'Tisn't there now, an' I don't know as I'm crazy about seeing it again."

Jonathan pointed to the place where the *Firefly* was gently forging ahead.

"Can you see anything afloat over there?" he asked.

Craig shook his head.

"No, I thought so," said the skipper. "Maybe there wasn't anything loomed up under our starboard bow just now. Maybe there was. But you can take it from me that it won't happen again so long as you keep this ship headed north."

Day after day Jonathan stuck to the same course, dogging the heels of the other craft. In the full glare of the sun the barquentine appeared at intervals as a vague, filmy blur, but at night her form became more tangible. He could see her sails flapping in the distance, and sometimes he almost fancied that voices were borne across the water.

There lies in the North Atlantic one sweep of water named the Sargasso Sea, which is like a dead thing. Nature's vast ocean currents, pouring on eternally, describe a gigantic circle around the Sargasso, upon the still bosom of which collects, sooner or later, everything adrift on those waters. Dense masses of weed, torn from their moorings in shallow places, are borne thousands of miles in an ever narrowing circle until, caught by an eddie, they end their journey and join the great stretch of dank vegetation in the centre. Save when a gale sweeps the surface of the Sargasso, the very air in that region is almost lifeless, for it is beyond the edge of the trade winds, and deep-sea mariners will tell you that the far-flung carpet of yellowish gulf weed there, impassable at times even for a full rigged ship, is trodden by the spirits of men whose vessels fell into the trap. Slowly decaying derelicts, some awash, some with a spar or two still proudly held aloft, lie in the Sargasso, mute witnesses of disaster. And around them, matted together by the weaving process of ceaseless growth, stretch the masses of weed.

Upon the deck of a derelict in the Sargasso Sea, there sprawled the figure of a man. He moaned at intervals, for the torture of thirst was upon him. Death was hovering near, mercifully, for he had seen nameless terrors. Once he had had the physique of a man in ten thousand. But that was months ago. It seemed like years since, helpless as a log, the ship drifted into that nightmare of weed. There had been rum at first, and the constant hope of a friendly sail and a gale to tear asunder the grip of the weed. But the

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rum did not last long, and then began the savagery of men who feared one another, and feared still more the fate closing remorselessly in upon them. When the water supply began to fail, one of them cheated. He, it was, who now groaned on the deck. He filled two stone jars in the lazarette with water, and left them there, almost untouched, until the last of the crew died. For three days, now, even those jars had been empty. The first strong wind for months had begun to sweep over the face of the ocean, lashing it to spume, and tearing great rifts in the weed. The ship became practically clear at times, but her spars were naked. She lay supine as the hissing waves licked her sides hungrily. The man on her deck raised his head feebly occasionally. And then for the last time he glanced out over the sea.

His tongue was swollen, his eyes were blood-shot; he was by now incapable of thinking coherently. Sprawling there, he had seen strange things—passenger steamers of incredible size, tearing past, green fields with cattle grazing in them contentedly, fountains of water trickling softly. Other things, too, he had seen, and some of them had seemed very real. There was a shape that emerged from the slimy weed, and thrust long, shaking tentacles over the side of the vessel. There stood near him, stooped over him, the form of a man, who had a knife sticking into his back. That was worse than the palsied tentacles.

Now he could see a schooner bearing right down on the derelict. It, too, looked real, oddly real. Even more so than some of the other things. But the man's head sank on to his arm, and he lay still.

The schooner, however, came nearer, forging her way through the weed before the wind, and presently a boat was lowered. Two men clambered over the rail of the

derelict. One walked quickly to the sprawling sailor, and turned him over on his back.

"Slip back to the schooner, quick, Craig," he called to his companion, "and fetch some water. There's one man here, anyway, still alive, but he looks as though he hasn't wet his lips for a week."

"Right, cap'n!" replied Craig.

Then the skipper of the schooner made a hasty examination of the vessel. The stripped spars told him a part of the story. He looked in the locker where the log was always kept. His fingers closed on the book. They were not absolutely steady as he opened it, for, at least up to the time when David died, the story would be told there. On the last page, in the skipper's own peculiar spiky fist, was written:

"I expect this will be the last entry I'll make. If the crew don't find the log, it may be useful. They have seized the ship. Skelken started it by murdering the mate. Now a gale of wind has stripped her of canvas, so they'll just drift. If the *Firefly* doesn't reach port they won't be able to sell the stuff under the hatches. I'm getting too weak to write. Good-bye, Anna. You've been a rare wife. Good-bye, Jonathan. I could almost fancy you were here just now. If only I could let you know!"

Jonathan jumped on deck blindly. Craig was kneeling by the side of the sailor. The man's eyes were open. His lips were moist for the first time for days. The fierce desire for life was burning within him afresh.

Jonathan stooped over the fellow.

"Is your name Skelken?" he asked.

Skelken nodded.

"Take care of this man, Craig," ordered Jonathan grimly.

"I think he'll live now, for awhile."

"He's got to live for a little yet—if we can make him."





"WHAT A JOLLY WOMAN SHE SEEMS TO BE!" EXCLAIMED A SOFT, SILVERY VOICE
AT HIS SHOULDER.

The Gloaming Ghosts

A
COMPLETE
STORY

By
GEORGE BARR
MCUTCHEON

ILLUSTRATED BY
E. H. SHEPARD

A Christmas Ghost Story by the Author of "Brewster's Millions"

GLOAMING had been the Virginia home of the Gloames for two centuries at least, yet the years had made but little change in its appearance. Nine generations of Gloames had begun life in the picturesque old house and it had been the pride of each. Its furnishings

and its treasures were almost as antique as the building. Decrepit age alone was responsible for the retirement of historic bits of furniture. The plate was as old as the hills, the service as venerable. Gloaming looked to be the great-great-grandparent of every other habitation in the valley.

Colonel Cassady Gloame was the last of the long and illustrious race. He was going to the grave childless; the name would end with him. True, he would, doubtless, leave a widow, but what is a widow when one figures on the perpetuation of a name? The colonel was far past sixty, his wife barely twenty-five. He loved her devotedly, and it is only just to say that she esteemed him more highly than any other man in all the world.

Now, the Christmas holidays were always a season of great merriment at Gloaming. There was always a genial house-party in holiday times, and Gloaming rang free with the pleasures of the light-hearted. The colonel himself was the merriest of the merry-makers, second only in enthusiasm to his sunny young wife. The night of Christmas Eve, 1897, found the old mansion crowded with guests, most of whom were spending the week with the Gloames. There had been dancing and music and games, and eleven o'clock brought fatigue for even the liveliest of the guests. It was then that pretty Louise Kelly peremptorily commanded the colonel to tell the oft-told tale of the Gloaming Ghosts.

"Come to order," she cried to the guests in the great rooms. "Colonel Gloame is going to tell us about those dear old ghosts. Lieutenant King has just confessed that he has never heard of the Gloaming Ghosts and, furthermore, he laughed when I told him that you boasted of real, live ghosts more than a hundred years old."

"Oh, we are very proud of our ghosts. Lieutenant King!" cried Mrs. Gloame.

The colonel, despite his customary remonstrances, would not have missed telling the story for worlds. He liked to be coaxed. He was in his element when the score or more of eager guests, old and young, crowded into the room about him and implored him to go on with the tale.

"It's a mighty threadbare sort of a ghost we have here, my dear lieutenant," he admitted at last, and there was a sigh of contentment from the lips of many. They knew the story would be forthcoming. "Poor old thing, I've told about her so often I'm afraid she'll refuse to come and visit us any more."

At this juncture young Mr. Garrison strolled leisurely into the room, coming from the dining-room, where he had lingered with the port and cigars. He was a tall,

fair young fellow of twenty-four, a year younger than his sister, the pretty Mrs. Gloame. The colonel stood with his back to the blazing grate, confronting the crowd of eager listeners, who had dragged chairs and settles and cushions from all parts of the house to prepare the auditorium.

"Come here, Frank, and hear the ghost story!" cried his sister, making room between herself and Miss Kelly.

"Same old story?" inquired the youth, stifling a yawn.

"Of course. Come and sit between us."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of ghosts!" replied Frank Garrison indifferently. Miss Kelly looked daggers through her tender, blue eyes.

"I wonder what that boy has on his mind?" murmured Mrs. Gloame anxiously.

"Nothing," responded Miss Kelly sweetly. But the colonel was beginning.

"Whatever you may think of this story," he began, "I can assure you that there is a very deep mystery attached to Gloaming, and as I cannot offer the faintest explanation except to call your attention to the supernatural conditions which exist, I am obliged to admit that I, for one, firmly believe the house is haunted. My great-great-grandfather, Godfrey Gloame, was born in this house, and he brought a beautiful bride here when he was married twenty-five years afterward. He was, as are all the Gloames, a Virginian of the old type, and he was a fire-eater, so the family records say. When he was married it was to a young lady of wealth and position in the North—a very gay and, if I must say it, a particularly ah!—unsatisfactory mistress of a home.

"My great-great-grandmother was a beautiful woman, and she was well aware of that fact. Her husband was a jealous devil, as unreasonable as a jackass, and as stubborn as an ox. To make a long story short, after they had been married five years and had seen enough of the connubial hell to drive them both out of mind, he took a sudden fancy that she was false to him. A young Virginian, in fact the very man who had been best man at the wedding, was a frequent visitor at this house, and was a decided favourite with my maternal ancestor. Godfrey took to drinking rather heavily, simply because he found it impossible to discover anything wrong in his wife's conduct—I may say that he had watched her, too, ladies and

gentlemen. Being too honourable to accuse her without having actual proof, he suffered in silence and his cups, all the time allowing the gap between them to grow wider and wider. One night he came home late and saw his friend, Harry Heminway, leaving the place on horseback. Inflamed by jealousy, and drink, too, I reckon, he dashed up to his wife's room. I do not know what followed, for no one ever knew, but the next morning they found her dead on the bed, her throat cut from ear to ear in a most dreadful manner. He was dead on the floor, the same knife sticking in his breast.

"Within a week after the murder queer things began to happen in that room," the colonel went on. "Odd noises were to be heard, muffled screams came from behind the closed doors, and finally the people who lived here saw the white, ghostly form of

my great-great-grandmother moving about in the room and in the halls. Ever since that time her spirit can be seen up there, for it comes round every now and again to see if anybody desecrates the room by trying to sleep in it. With my own eyes I have seen it—dozens of times. Since my marriage it has not been here, but I expect it almost any night."

And then George appeared suddenly in the hall-door, and his stentorian though eminently-respectable tones startled the entire assemblage, the colonel included. There were a dozen little feminine shrieks, and more than one man caught his breath sharply. George was the negro butler at Gloaming.

"Majah Harpeh's kerridge, sah," he announced obsequiously.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" gasped Miss Kelly, mightily relieved. Then, in confusion: "I



THE NEGRO BUTLER APPEARED SUDDENLY
IN THE DOORWAY, AND HIS STENTORIAN
TONES STARTLED THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLAGE.

mean, Mrs. Harper, that I'm glad it isn't the ghost, you know."

Half an hour later the rooms were deserted, except for the presence of a tall young man with a far-away, dissatisfied look in his eyes. In all the spare bed-chambers guests were preparing for bed. Young Frank Garrison had said good-night to all of them and remained below stairs to commune with himself at the midnight hour.

For many minutes he sat before the fireplace, staring moodily at the flames. Mr. Garrison admitted reluctantly that it was all very nice at Gloaming, that it was "a decent place to spend the holidays and all that, you know," but for a very well-defined reason he was wishing they were over and he was back in the whirl of the city once more. He was in love. It is not unusual for a young man of his age to be desperately in love, and it is by no means unusual that he should be in love with the most impossible of persons. Frank Garrison's affections at this period of his life were the property of a very pretty and decidedly popular member of the chorus at the Jollity.

After convincing himself that he was alone in the huge old room, the hopeless Mr. Garrison guiltily drew from the inside pocket of his coat a thick and scrawly letter. Then he did things to this letter that in after years he would blush to acknowledge, if they remained a part of his memory. He kissed the scribble—undeniably. Then, with rapt eyes, he re-read the lengthy missive from "Dolly." It had come by the morning post, and he had read it a dozen times. The reader is left to conjecture just what the letter contained. Mr. Garrison's thoughts were running something like this:

"Lord, if my sister knew about you, Dolly, she'd have so many fits that you couldn't count 'em. They think I'm an absolute stick when it comes to love. If they only knew! What the deuce did I do with that photograph—ah, here it is! Inside vest-pocket, left-hand side—just where it belongs."

He pulled a small photograph from his vest-pocket and sat gazing at it rapturously. It was the portrait of the fair Dolly in tights. After a long scrutiny of this rather picturesque product of Nature and the photographer, he rose, and, with a sigh, turned off all the lights in the room, still

holding the picture in his hand. The fire in the grate was now the only means of illumination, and the hall was dark. Reconsidering his impulse to go to bed, he threw himself in a chair before the grate, his elbow resting on the mahogany table at its right. There he devoted himself to dreams. A wave of cold air crossing his back brought him from dreamland.

"Some one must have left a door open," he grumbled. He looked up and down the hall, and then resumed his seat before the fire. A moment later the chilly draught struck him. "Confound it! There's a devil of a draught from somewhere. It goes clean through me. Must be a crack in the floor. That's the trouble with these shacks that somebody's grandfather built before the flood." He vigorously poked up the fire and drew his chair a little closer to the circle of warmth.

Had he turned his head for an instant as he sat down he could have seen that he was not alone in the room. A tall, shadowy woman in white was standing in the hall-door, looking pensively in upon him. For a full minute she stood there, hesitating between modesty and curiosity, and then turned as if to glide away. Reconsidering, she smiled defiantly, and more or less nervously, and then turned back into the room. Of course, he did not hear her as she approached. The mere fact that her filmy-white dress was of the fashion in vogue a century and a half ago should prove her identity to the reader. She was the Gloaming Ghost.

Frank Garrison was softly, tenderly addressing the photograph of the airy but not ethereal Dolly. The words were not for the ears of others. Even the infatuated lover would have despised the strain of softness in his tones had he known there was a hearer.

"If you could but speak to me," he was saying to the picture, "you'd make me happy, I know. You'd tell me that you love me. You've got it just as bad as I have, haven't you, Dolly?"

"What a jolly woman she seems to be!" exclaimed a soft, silvery voice at his shoulder. Garrison whirled and looked up into the beautiful face of the ghost.

She was standing directly before him now, tall and straight.

"Who—what in Heaven's name are you?" he cried.

"Why, don't you know me? I am Mrs. Godfrey Gloame," she replied, a touch of resentment in her voice.

"The—the ghost?"

"That's what they call me," she admitted sadly. "It's such a horrid thing to be called, too. In reality, I'm merely a visitor from another world. There are many more of my kind in this room at this instant, sir, but you cannot see them. They are visible to me, however. If it interests you in the least, I can tell you that you are surrounded by ghosts. Over in that corner, looking from the window, stands my daughter-in-law, Mrs. George Gloame. I saw her husband, my son, sitting in the hall as I came through. Judging from their attitudes, they've had another of those horrid quarrels. I hope you'll pardon me for disturbing you. You looked so lonely, I couldn't resist the desire to come in and see you as I was passing."

Garrison was regaining his composure rapidly. The first uncanny shock was wearing off, and he was confessing to himself that there was nothing to fear in the spectral bit of loveliness. It rather bothered him though to discern, through that graceful form, objects on the opposite side of the room.

"I—I'm sure I appreciate the honour," he said, bowing low. "I—er—felt your draught when you came in," he said. "But, if you will pardon me, Mrs. Gloame, there is something uncanny about you just the same. You'll admit that, I'm sure. The colonel has been telling us about you. How would you have felt when you were in the flesh to have had a horrible ghost suddenly walk in upon you?"

"Oh, I am horrible, am I?" she said, as she leaned towards him with an entrancing smile.

"Heavens, no!" he retracted. "You are a marvel of beauty. I don't wonder that your husband was jealous."

"I may as well tell you that my husband drank terribly. It inflamed his jealousy, I think."



"HAVE YOU COME FAR TO-NIGHT?" HE ASKED. "FROM THE GRAVEYARD A MILE DOWN THE ROAD. IT IS A BEAUTIFUL CEMETERY, ISN'T IT?" SHE ANSWERED.

"The Gloame pedigree says that you drove him to it."

"I know that is what the Gloames claim, but it is a shameless slander. My poor, dear husband has told me since we died that he was wrong, and he would give all he had on earth to set me right in that hateful old pedigree. The poor fellow killed himself, as you doubtless know. I never was so shocked in my life as when I heard that he had committed such a brutal act." Mrs. Gloame was looking sadly, reminiscently into the fire, and there was a trace of tears in her voice.

"But, my dear madam, didn't he begin by slaying you?" exclaimed Garrison in surprise.

"To be sure, he did destroy me first, or I might have kept him from committing the awful crime of suicide," she said despondently.

"But murder is so much worse than

suicide," expostulated Garrison. "We hang men for murder now, you know."

"I've a notion that it would be difficult to hang them for suicide. But you are quite wrong in your estimation of the crime. You don't know what it is to be murdered, I presume?"

"Well, hardly."

"Nor what it is to commit suicide? Well, let me advise you, judging from what I know of the hereafter, get murdered in preference to committing suicide. I'd even suggest that you commit murder, if you are determined to do anything rash."

"And be hanged for it?"

"You can be hanged or be d——d, just as you like," she said meaningly. "I wish you could talk to my husband, if you are thinking of doing anything of the kind. I'm sure your young love affair must be getting to the suicide stage by this time."

"But I don't want to kill anybody, much less myself. Oh, I beg your pardon!" he cried suddenly. "Pray have a chair, Mrs. Gloame. It was unpardonable of me to let you remain standing so long. I've been a trifle knocked out—I mean disconcerted. That's my only excuse."

"You are not expected to know anything about ghost etiquette," she said sweetly, dropping into a chair at the side of the table farthest from the fire. Garrison had some fear that her vapoury figure might sink through the chair, but he was agreeably surprised to find that it did not. Mrs. Gloame leaned back with a sigh of contentment, and deliberately crossed her pretty feet on the fender.

"Won't you sit nearer to the fire?" he asked. "It's very cold out to-night, and you must be chilled to the bone. Have you come far to-night?"

"From the graveyard a mile down the road. It is a beautiful cemetery, isn't it?"

"I am quite a stranger in these parts. Besides, I'm not partial to graveyards."

"Oh, dear me!" she cried in confusion. "The idea of me sitting here talking to a total stranger all this time. You must think me extremely bold."

"I am the bold one, madam. It's my first experience, you know, and I think I'm doing pretty well, don't you? By the way, Mrs. Gloame, my name is Frank Garrison, of New York, and my sister is the present Mrs. Gloame."

"The pretty young thing with the old Gloame husband?"

"Can't say she's pretty, you know. She's my sister."

"I passed her in the hall to-night."

"The dev—the deuce you did!" cried Garrison, coming to his feet in alarm. "Then she must be lying out there in a dead faint." He was starting for the door when she recalled him.

"Oh, she did not see me. She merely shivered, and asked a servant to close the door. An ill-wind seems to be a north wind, so far as ghosts are concerned," she concluded pathetically. "So you are from New York! Dear old New York—I haven't been there for a hundred and thirty-five years, I dare say. One in my position rather loses count of the years, you know. I suppose the place is greatly changed? And your lady-love lives there, too, I see."

"My lady-love?" demanded the young man, taken aback.

"Yes, the girl who is so well dressed from her shoulders up"—with a tantalising smile.

"You mean—this?" he asked, turning a fiery red as he tried to slip the picture of Dolly under a book.

"Let me see it, please. Who is she?" He was ashamed, but he handed her the picture. A poorly disguised look of disgust crossed the charming features of Mrs. Godfrey Gloame.

"She's—a friend of the colonel's."

"I should think his wife would do well to be on her guard. This is the first time I ever saw such a costume. In my day, a woman would not have dared to do such a thing. Don't you know her?"

"Oh, casually," answered he, looking away.

"I'm glad to hear that. She is nothing to you, then?"

He shook his head in fine disdain.

"Then I'll be doing a kind deed by destroying the picture. Your sister must never see it." Before he could prevent her, she coolly tossed Dolly into the fireplace.

"Oh, I say, now!" he began indignantly, but her confident smile checked him instantly. "You're right," he went on: "she wouldn't like it if she saw Dolly's picture."

"I don't care much for you men in these days, Mr. Garrison," she said.

"You're not complimentary."

"When I compare the men of my day—"

men like Godfrey—with the men of to-day, I thank Heaven I had the honour to be killed by a gentleman. Poor old Godfrey—he had his points."

"Does he ever come here?"

"Not often. There are so many unpleasant associations, he says. It was here that the funeral took place, and he has expressed very strong exceptions to the sermon of a minister who alluded to him as an unfortunate victim of his own folly. The idea! It would have been folly indeed for Godfrey to have lived after I was dead. Every woman in Virginia would have been crazy to marry him. And then one of the pall-bearers did not suit him. He had cheated Godfrey in a deal—about a horse, I think."

"I should like to have known Godfrey Gloame."

"You would have admired him. He was

the best pistol-shot, the bravest man in all Virginia. Three times he fought duels, coming off victorious each time. He would have been an ideal husband if he had not been so indolent, so dissipated, and so absurdly jealous of Harry Heminway. I shall never forgive him for killing me on account of poor Harry."

"Is that why he killed you?" asked Garrison eagerly.

"He said so at the time, but he was sorry for it afterwards. That is usually the way with jealous men."

"Whew!" exclaimed the man, starting up. "There's another draught. Didn't you feel it?"

"It is my husband coming. I know his footstep," she said, delightedly looking towards the door.

"Holy smoke!" cried Frank in alarm.

"Don't let him hear you speak of smoke. He is very touchy about it just now. Ah, come in, Godfrey dear!"

She crossed to the door to meet the tall, grey young man in the eighteenth century costume, Garrison looking on with open mouth and rising hair.

Godfrey Gloame was a handsome fellow, albeit he was as transparent as glass. His hair was powdered with all the care of a dandy, and his garments hung properly upon his square frame. He kissed his wife, and then glared at young Mr. Garrison.

"Who is this man, Beatrice?" he demanded, his hand going to his



"IF YOU CARE TO COME TO THE ROOM IN THE SOUTH WING, YOU WILL FIND ME THERE AT ALMOST ANY TIME," WAS HER PARTING INVITATION

sword hilt. Mrs. Gloame caught his arm, and there was passionate entreaty in her eyes. "Speak, woman! What are you doing here with him at this time of night?"

"Now, don't be cross, Godfrey," she pleaded. "It's only Mr. Garrison."

"And who the devil is Mr. Garrison?"

"What a very disagreeable ghost!" muttered Frank, remembering that ghosts are harmless.

Mrs. Gloame led the unruly Godfrey up to the table and, in a delightfully old-fashioned way, introduced the two gentlemen.

"Mr. Garrison is the brother of my successor, the present mistress of Gloaming," she said.

"And a devilish pretty woman, too. I've seen her frequently. By the way, I stopped in her boudoir as I came through. But that's neither here nor there. What are you doing here with this young whippersnapper, Beatrice?"

"Let me explain, Mr. Gloame," began young Garrison hastily.

"I desire no explanation from you, sir," interposed Godfrey, towering with dignity. "You would explain just as all men do under like circumstances. Beatrice, I demand satisfaction."

"Be rational, Godfrey, for once in your life. It is beneath my dignity to respond to your insult," said Mrs. Gloame proudly.

"Good for you, Mrs. Gloame!" cried Garrison approvingly. "You would be a fine actress."

"Sir, you insult my wife by that remark!" roared Godfrey Gloame, and this time the sword was unsheathed.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you, old chap," said Garrison bravely. "You're nothing but wind, you know. Be calm, and have a chair by the fire. Your wife says you have chills."

"I do not require an invitation to sit down in my own house, sir. I am Godfrey Gloame, sir, of Gloaming, sir."

"You mean you were. You are now his shade—ah, that's the word I've been trying to think of—shade! You are shades—that's it—shades, not ghosts. Yes, Mr. Gloame, I've heard all about your little affair, and I am sure that you were a bit too hasty. You had no cause to be jealous of your wife. She assures me of it, and from what I've seen of her, I'd be willing to believe anything she says."

"Ah, too true, too true! I always was, and always will be, a fool! It was she who should have slain me. Will you ever forgive me, Beatrice—forgive me fully?" said Godfrey in deep penitence.

"I can forgive everything but the fact that you were so shockingly tipsy the night you killed us," said she, taking his hands in hers.

"Oh, I'd had an awful night, my dear! My head aches to think of it!"

"It was not the murder I condemn so much as the condition you were in when you did it," she complained. "Mr. Garrison, you do not know how humiliating it is to be killed by a man who is too tipsy to know where the jugular vein is located. My neck was slashed—oh, shockingly!"

"Yes, my dear sir, if I must admit it. I did it in a most bungling manner," said her husband. "Usually I am very careful in matters of such importance, and I am only able to attribute the really indecent butchery to the last few glasses I took of General Bannard's rum punch. My hand was very unsteady, wasn't it, dearest? By the way, I want an explanation for your damnably improper conduct to-night, madam. This matter of meeting a man here at twelve o'clock is——"

"Goodness!" cried Mrs. Gloame anxiously. "It is not twelve, is it? I must hasten away by a quarter after twelve."

"It lacks considerable of that hour," said Garrison. Turning to Godfrey Gloame, who was leaning against the mantel, he went on to explain: "You see, sir, I was reading here and your wife dropped in—blew in, I might say—all without my knowledge, very much as you did. She had had no invitation, we had made no appointment—I mean arrangement—and I was paralysed at first. Your wife is a perfect stranger to me. There is a disparity in our ages that ought to protect her. I am twenty-four, and she is at least a hundred and fifty."

"Sir! I am but twenty-five!" exclaimed Mrs. Gloame indignantly.

"Madam, I must remind you that you have a great-great-grandson in Colonel Gloame, the present, who, by the way, is very proud of his ancestry. But pardon my jesting, please. Would you like a little brandy or a glass of wine? It is a cold night, even for shades. Let me prepare a toddy; it won't take a minute, and I

know how to make quite a decent cocktail. New thing in all the best clubs."

After a moment of indecision, the two Gloames sank into chairs beside the table. Godfrey waved his hand pleasantly, courteously.

"My dear sir," he said, "your explanation of this rather unaccountable situation is entirely acceptable. I see the position clearly, just as it is, and I humbly apologise for afflicting you with an insinuation. Beatrice, I crave your forgiveness again. Your offer of the toddy, Mr. Garrison, is timely, and I should be happy to place my approval upon your particular concoction."

"Godfrey," cried his wife in distress, "you swore you would never drink another drop!"

"But this shall be the last," he pleaded, "so help me—so help me—Moses!"

Garrison set to work with the colonel's decanters concocting a brew, the two wraiths looking on in silent admiration.

"How like you Mr. Garrison is, Godfrey," said Mrs. Gloame.

"Except the water, my dear," agreed Godfrey, taking it for granted that she referred to his ability to mix drinks. "Do you use the water to cleanse the goblet, Mr. Garrison?"

"Chief ingredient, Mr. Gloame," explained Frank, and Godfrey's heart sank heavily.

Garrison ceremoniously filled the goblets and handed them to his guests. Godfrey Gloame arose grandly, holding his glass aloft.

"Well, Mr. Garrison," he said, "I can only say to you that I am glad to have met you, and that I am sincerely sorry we have not been friends before. You have given us a very pleasant evening, quite unexpectedly, and I drink to your very good health."

"Hold, sir!" cried Garrison. "I am sure you will allow me to suggest an amendment. Let us drink to the everlasting joy of the fair woman who is your wife. May her shadow never grow less!"

"Thank you," said she. "I bid you drink, gentlemen, and share the joy with

me. Ah"—as she set the goblet down—"that is delicious!"

"Superb!" cried her husband. "My dear sir, it thrills me, it sends a warmth through me that I have not experienced for a hundred and thirty-five years. How long do you expect to remain at Gloaming?"

"One week longer."

"I shall come again if you will but prepare another like this."

"You swore that this would be your last, Godfrey; are you as vacillating as ever?" cried his wife.

"But I must have some sort of vice, dear," pleaded poor Godfrey. "By the way, can you tell me the correct time?"

"Ten minutes after twelve, sir."

"Oh, we must be going!" cried Mrs. Gloame.

"What's the hurry?" demanded Garrison.

"We cannot stay out after twelve-fifteen, sir. We get an extra fifteen minutes on Christmas Eve," explained Godfrey.

"We are led to believe that you stay out till the cock crows."

"Oh, these absurd superstitions!" cried Gloame merrily. "How ignorant the people are! Are you going my way, Godfrey?"

"Yes, dear, and I care not what the direction may be. Good-night, Mr. Garrison."

"Good-night," added the beautiful Mrs. Gloame, "and a Merry Christmas! I sincerely hope we have not annoyed you?"

"I have never enjoyed anything so hugely. No one will believe me when I tell this story at the club. Merry Christmas to both of you! You'll come again, won't you?"

They were at the door and looking back at him.

"If you care to come to the room in the south wing, you will find me there at almost any time, Mr. Garrison," was her parting invitation. Garrison was positive he heard Godfrey hiccough softly as they glided away in the darkness.

And no one *did* believe him when he told the story at the club.



RESURRECTION

BY
ALFRED NOYES

When all the altar lights were dead,
And mockery choked the heart's desire
When every faith on earth had fled,
A spirit rose on wings of fire.

He rose and sang. I never heard
A song of such ecstatic breath;
And, though I caught no throbbing word,
I knew that he had conquered death.

He sang no comfortable things;
But as a shaft had pierced his breast.
The crimson stain between his wings
Was deeper than the dying West.

He sang the agonies of loss;
Of wild farewells, and love's last kiss.
He sang in heaven as on a cross,
A spirit crucified with bliss.

Over these ruined shrines he rose,
These crumbling graves where all men grope,
Racked by the universal throes,
And singing the eternal hope.



THE JOLLY TIMES



CINDERELLA.

HIDDEN IN THIS PICTURE ARE THE PRINCE, THE UGLY SISTERS, THE PUMPKIN, THE SLIPPER, A RAT, A MOUSE, AND THE LIZARD CAN YOU FIND THEM?

Another Puzzle-Picture next month.

BRAVE ADMIRAL BANG



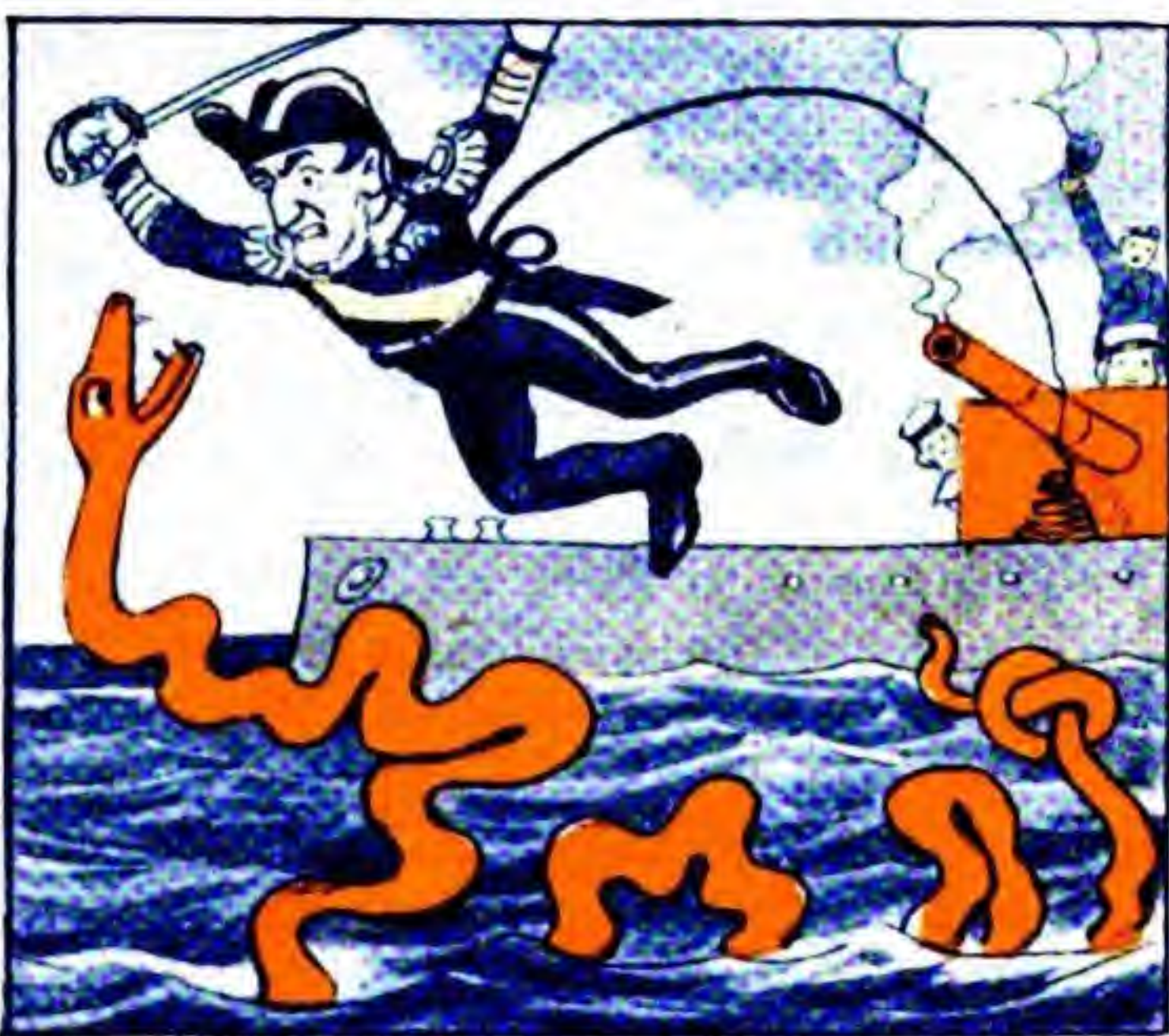
1. Admiral Bang, with his sailors three,
And his black pussy-cat all went to sea.



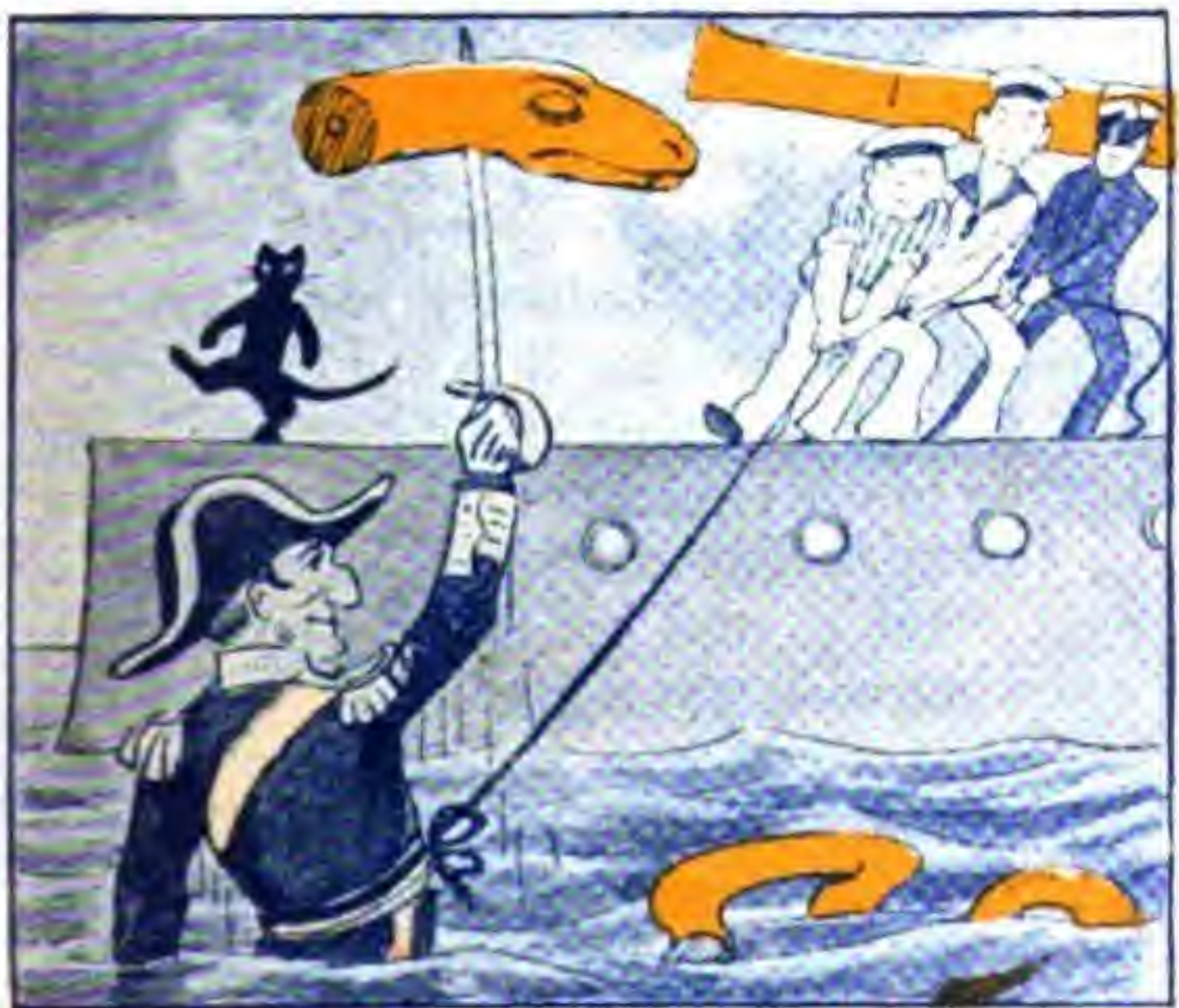
2. They hadn't gone a mile or more,
When a sea-serpent rose with a dreadful roar !



3. Alas ! the gun could not be fired,
For there wasn't a shell to be bought or hired.



4. So Admiral Bang got into the gun,
And they fired it off. Oh, it was such fun !



5. The serpent's neck he cut in twain,
And then they pulled him back again.



6. "Oh, gallant Admiral," they said,
"We thank you ! Now it's time for bed !"

[More adventures of Admiral Bang next month.]

SMILO: THE CIRCUS CLOWN



1. "Ladies and gentlemen, I will now tame this bucking broncho from Borneo."



2. "Woa! Steady! You'll be off the page in a minute!"



3. "Now I'm on— Oh, dear me! Now I'm off! I must try again."



4. "A little salt on his tail will tame the wildest horse."



5. "There you are! He's as quiet as a lamb while I jump through this hoop."

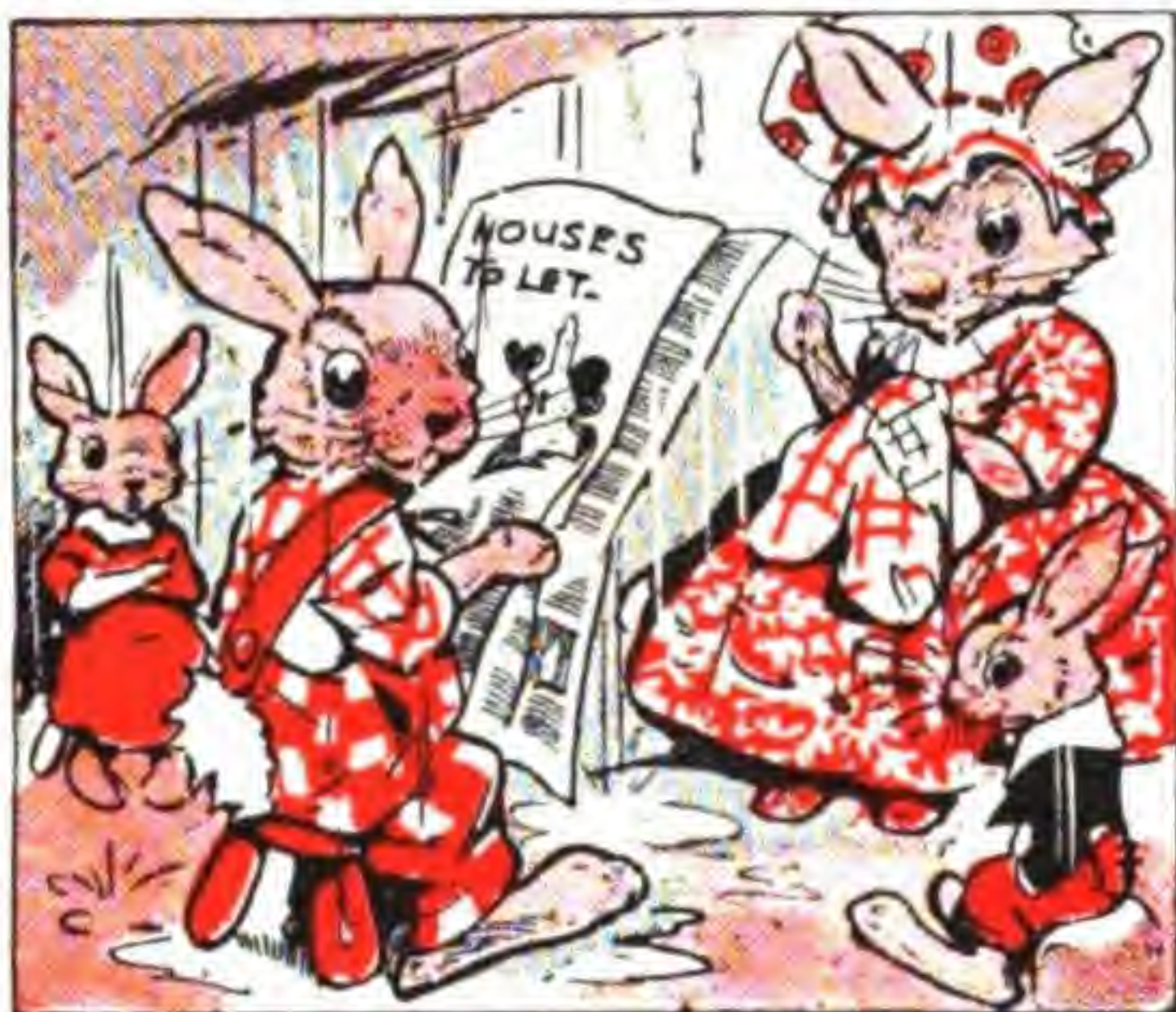


6. "Now we are good friends! Good-bye till next month!"

—SMILO.



THE ADVENTURES OF **BILLY & BUNNY** AND HIS FURRY FAMILY



1. "This house is decidedly damp!" said Billy Bunny. "Quite!" agreed Mrs. B. "We must move!" Beatrice and Bert cried: "Hurray!"



2. "Here is a lovely house, sir!" remarked Mr. Mouse, the house-agent. "And the rent is only two pieces of cheese per year!"



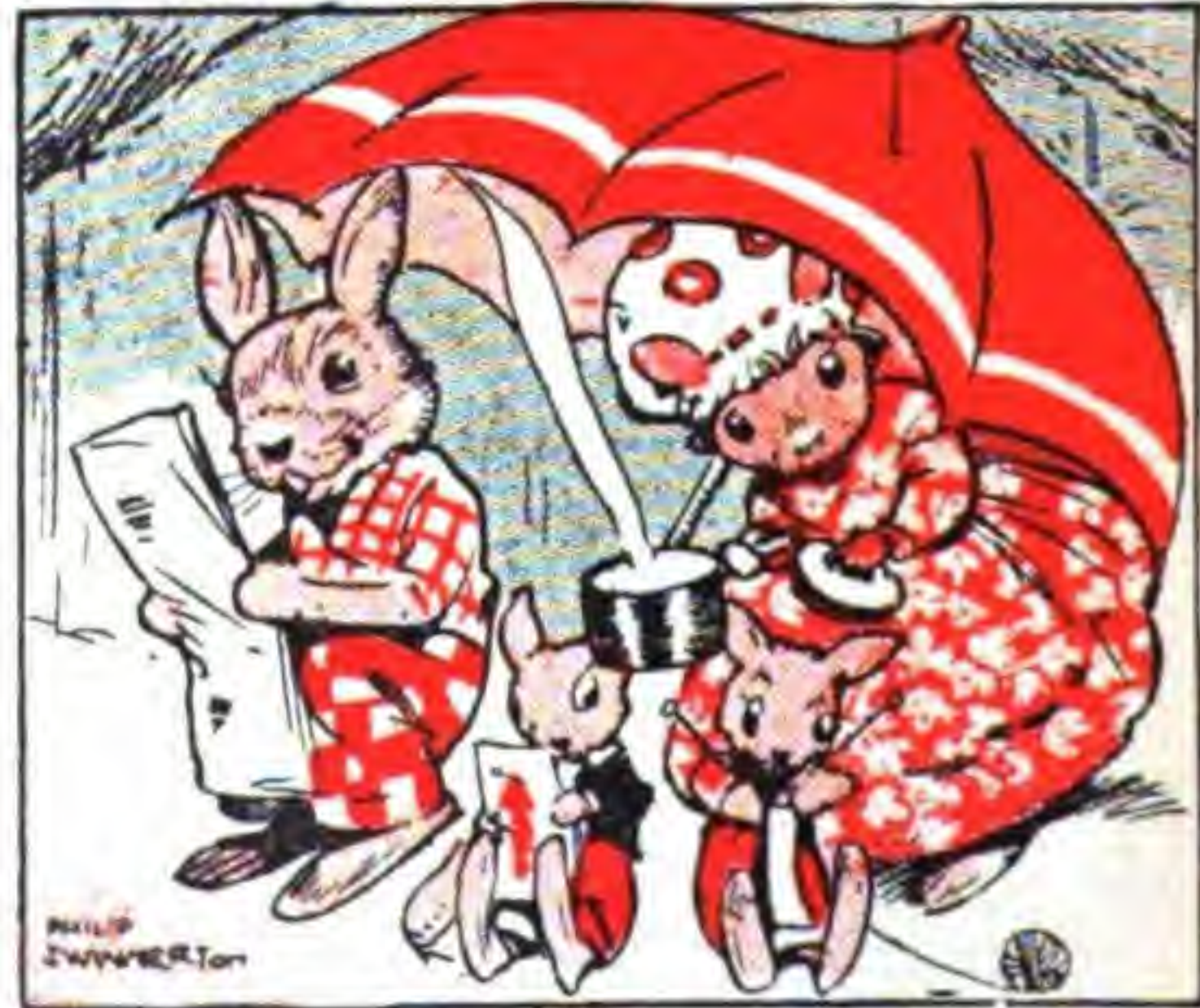
3. So the Bunnies moved. Everything was packed into the old blanket. My! How hot Billy got as he pulled the barrow!



4. Then the pictures had to be hung. Bang! went the hammer. Such a blow that the house rocked and began to—



5. Roll down the hill. "Oh, my poor hubby!" cried Mrs. Bunny. And Beatrice and Bert said: "Poor Papa will be hurt!"



6. "No more moves!" said Billy. So they went back to the old house, and kept the rain off with an umbrella.

THE JOLLY TIMES



JACK AND THE BEANSTALK.

HIDDEN IN THIS PICTURE ARE THE GIANT, THE COW, THE HEN, THE GOLDEN EGG, AND THE HARP. CAN YOU FIND THEM?

Another Puzzle-Picture next month

BRAVE ADMIRAL BANG



1. Now, Admiral Bang was very brave ;
He cared for neither wind nor wave.



2. "A leak ! A leak !" the sailors cried,
And trembled so they nearly died ,



3. For they were much afraid of cramp,
Because their feet were very damp.



4. The Admiral to their rescue came,
And stopped the hole with his own frame.



5. The sailors thought it no disgrace
To keep the Admiral in his place.



6. They ran the ship into the docks,
Where Admiral Bang gave out dry socks.

[More adventures of Admiral Bang next month.

SMILO:



THE CIRCUS CLOWN



1. "Tweenie, ring the bell for dinner. Smilo's late," says Weenie, drawing a chair to the table.



2. "Here we are!" says Smilo, bringing the dinner. "Hurry up, and then we'll play games!"



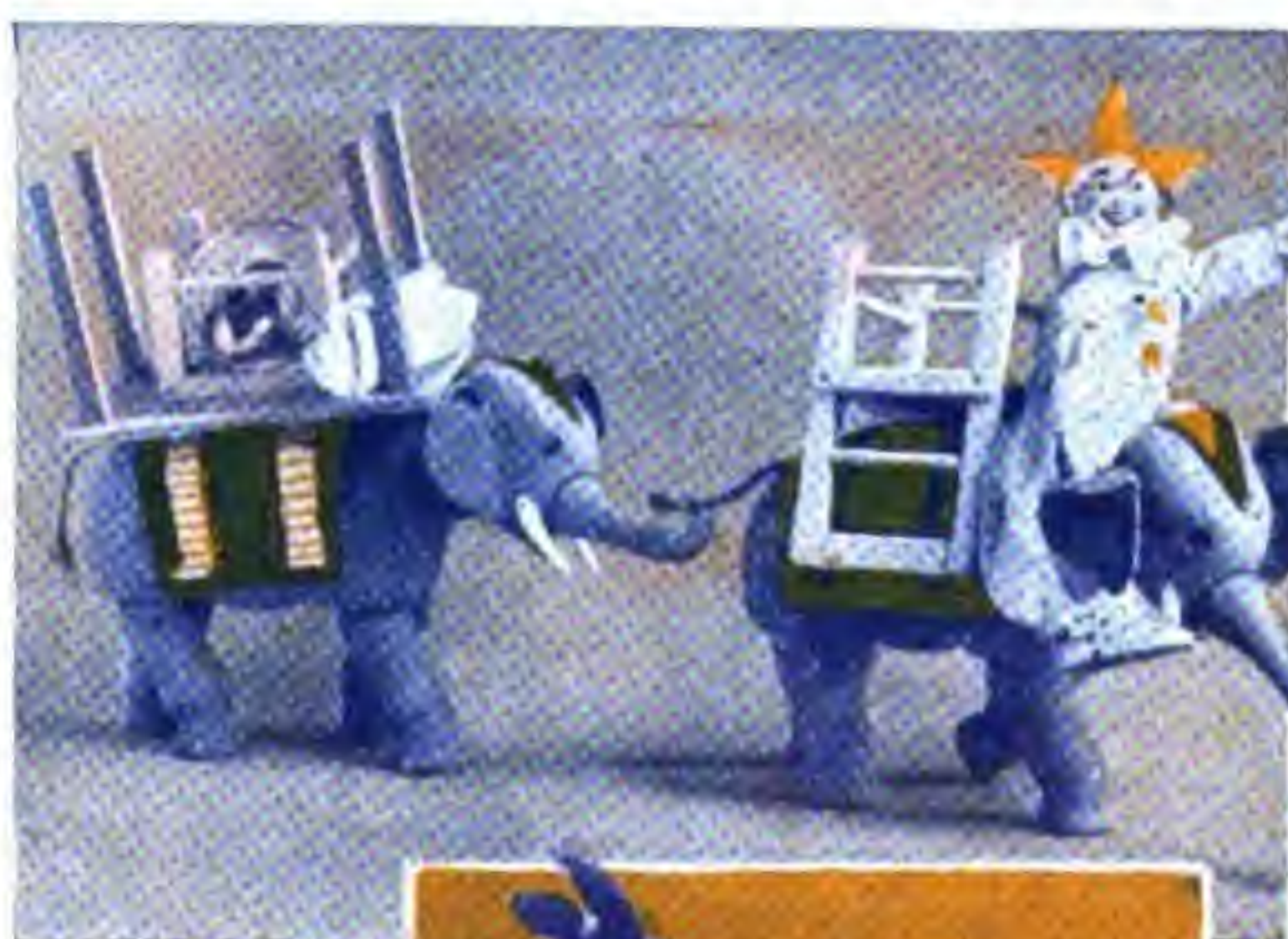
3. "Now for musical chairs! When the music stops you all sit down—if you can find a chair."



4. "Hurrah! We've got a chair," say Weenie and Tweenie. But look how they're cheating!



5. Now it's "follow-my-leader." "You must do all that I do," says Smilo. And Tweenie balanced so well that Smilo promised him a bun.



6. "Now pack up and off we go!" Look at naughty Weenie taking Tweenie's tail!



"He-Haw! Me next month!"

THE ADVENTURES OF **BILLY BUNNY** AND HIS FURRY FAMILY



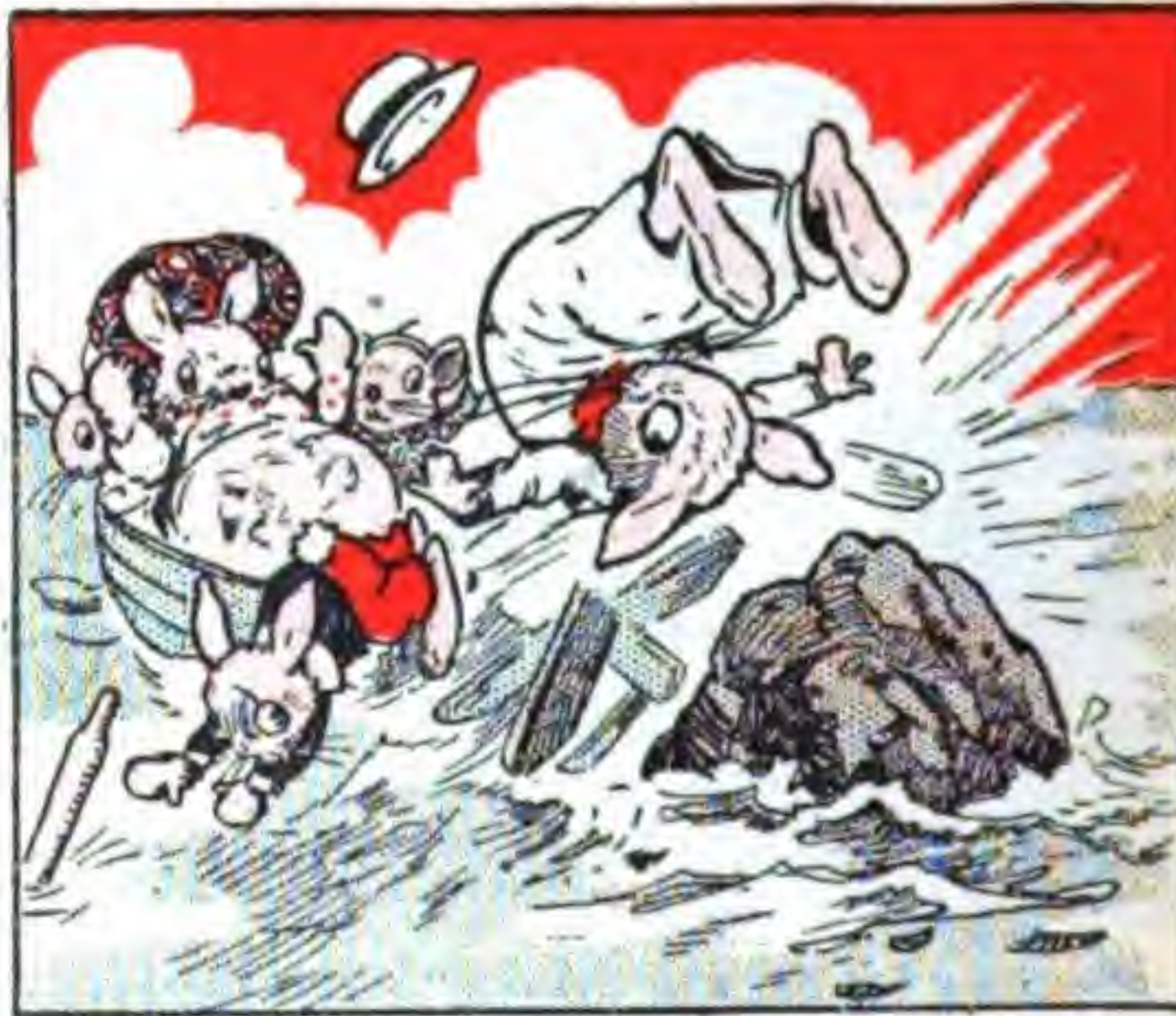
1. "Splendid day for a sail, sir!" said Boatman Mouse. "Shall we risk it, dear?" asked Billy Bunny. And Bert and Beatrice cried: "Oh, let's!" So off they set.



2. "Gracious!" cried Mrs. Bunny. "I'm afraid that poor sailor-man can't reach the water with his oars!" The Bunny family were so heavy they weighed the boat down at one end.



3. "I'll row!" said Billy, and then the boat flew along! "It's lovely and calm!" murmured Mrs. Bunny, and Billy pulled harder than ever—



4. Till he came to a rock! "Help!" shrieked Mrs. Bunny. But Bert and Beatrice said nothing—their mouths were too full of salt water.



5. Still, they all managed to climb on the rock, and Mr. Mouse looked round for help. Fortunately, Ferdinand Fish came on the scene and—



6. Carried them safely back to the shore on his back. "A nice shrimp tea will soon make us feel all right again!" said Mrs. Bunny.

JULY

JOLLY TIMES



THE BABES IN THE WOOD.

HIDDEN IN THIS PICTURE ARE THE WICKED UNCLE, THE TWO ROBBERS, THREE ROBINS, AND A SQUIRREL. CAN YOU FIND THEM?

Another Puzzle-Picture next month.

Brave Admiral Bang and his thrilling adventures at sea



1. Admiral Bang once told the tale
Of how he tamed a monstrous whale.



2. It oft would take him lovely rides,
And give him shower baths besides.



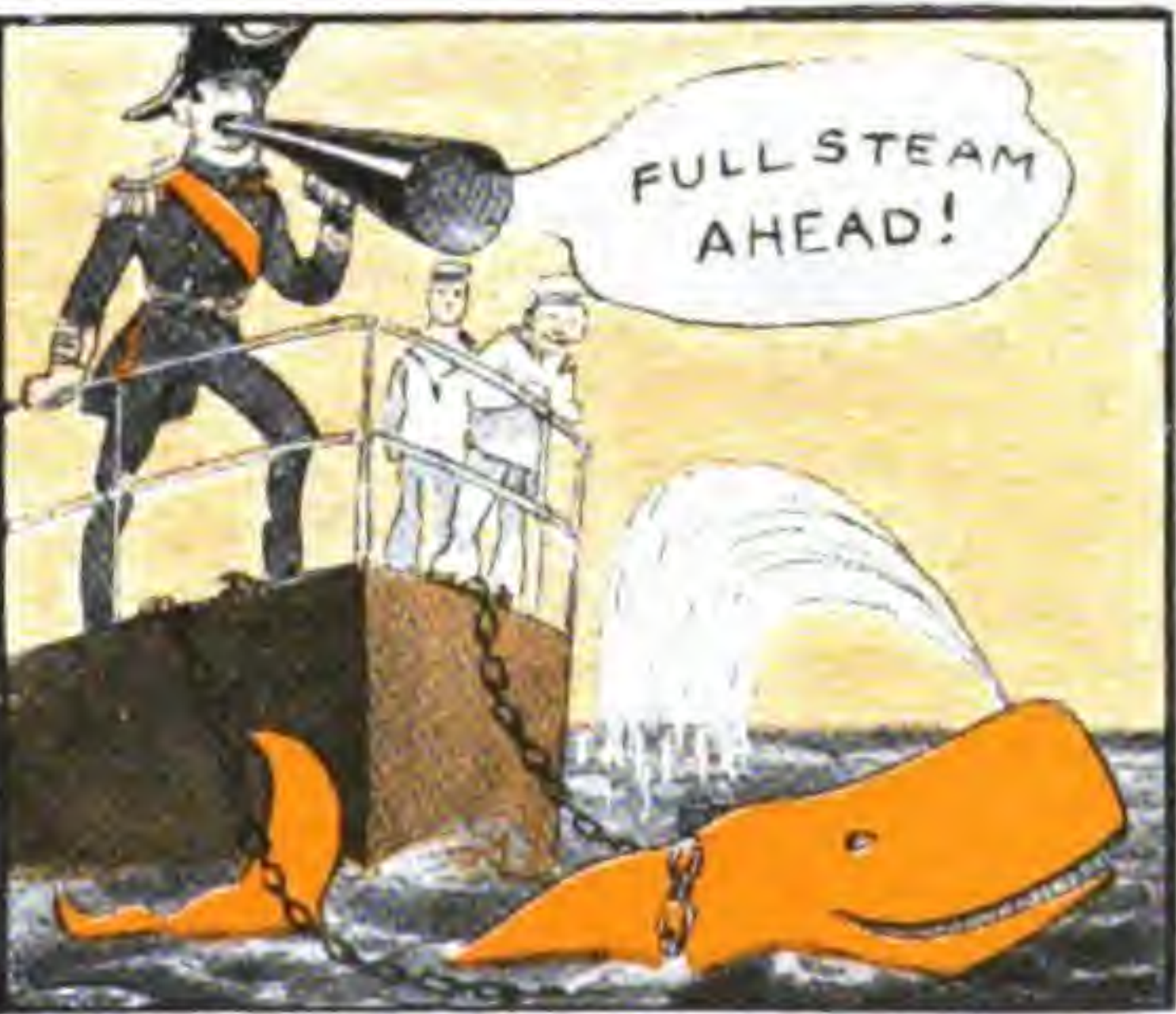
3. One day the sailors cried : " Oh dear !
The wheel's come off, we cannot steer ! "



4. " Cheer up ! " the Admiral replied,
And called the monster to his side.



5. The whale he scrambled up on deck,
And they put chains around his neck.



6. Then he did as he'd been taught,
And pulled the vessel into port.

SMILO: THE CIRCUS CLOWN



1. "Poor Hee Haw!" said Smilo. "You're lame. You've hurt your leg. I'm afraid you won't be able to do your clever tricks to-day."



2. Having tied up his leg and put him to bed, Smilo told Hee Haw to lie quiet while he went off to fetch Dr. Grinno, the wonderful animal doctor. "Be good, and lie quiet, now," said Smilo. "I'll be back in no time."

3. "Be quick!" said Smilo. "Hee Haw has hurt his leg!" "Wait till I put on my hat and get my instruments," said the great doctor. Then he and Smilo ran as fast as they could.

4. "What's that you say?" said Dr. Grinno. "I'm cutting off the wrong leg? Well, well, never mind; you'll never be able to hurt this one if I cut it off."



5. Luckily for Hee Haw, before Dr. Grinno could cut off his foot, there was a loud roar, and Mr. Hippo arrived on the scene. "Off you, go!" he cried, chasing them away. "I'm going to do some tricks! It's my turn next-month!"

THE ADVENTURES OF **BILLY BUNNY** AND HIS FURRY FAMILY



1. The Bunnie family were enjoying the loveliest picnic in the country, when suddenly Bert spied a bull coming, and gave the alarm.



2. Oh dear! Wasn't it annoying? But Billy soon had an idea. "Gather round under the table-cloth!" he cried. And the Bunnies scurried.



3. "My goodness!" gasped Bovro, the bull, at the strange sight which met him. And then Billy said "G-r-r-r-r!" and Bovro bolted.



4. Away went the bull as fast as he could gallop. But although he got safely across, the Bunnies couldn't see the stream until—



5. PLOP!—they all fell in. "Launch the life-boat!" cried Bert. "Gug-gurgle!" said Beatrice. Then Billy found the bank and pulled them out.



6. Then four very wet Bunnies walked home. "No more picnics!" said Billy. "No!" cried Bert. "Most decidedly NO!" said Mrs. Bunny.

AUG. **JOLLY TIMES**



LITTLE RED RIDING-HOOD.

HIDDEN IN THIS PICTURE ARE THE GRANDMOTHER, THE BASKET OF GOOD THINGS TO EAT, RED RIDING-HOOD'S MOTHER, THE WOODMAN, AND THE WOODMAN'S AXE. CAN YOU FIND THEM?

Another Puzzle-Picture next month.

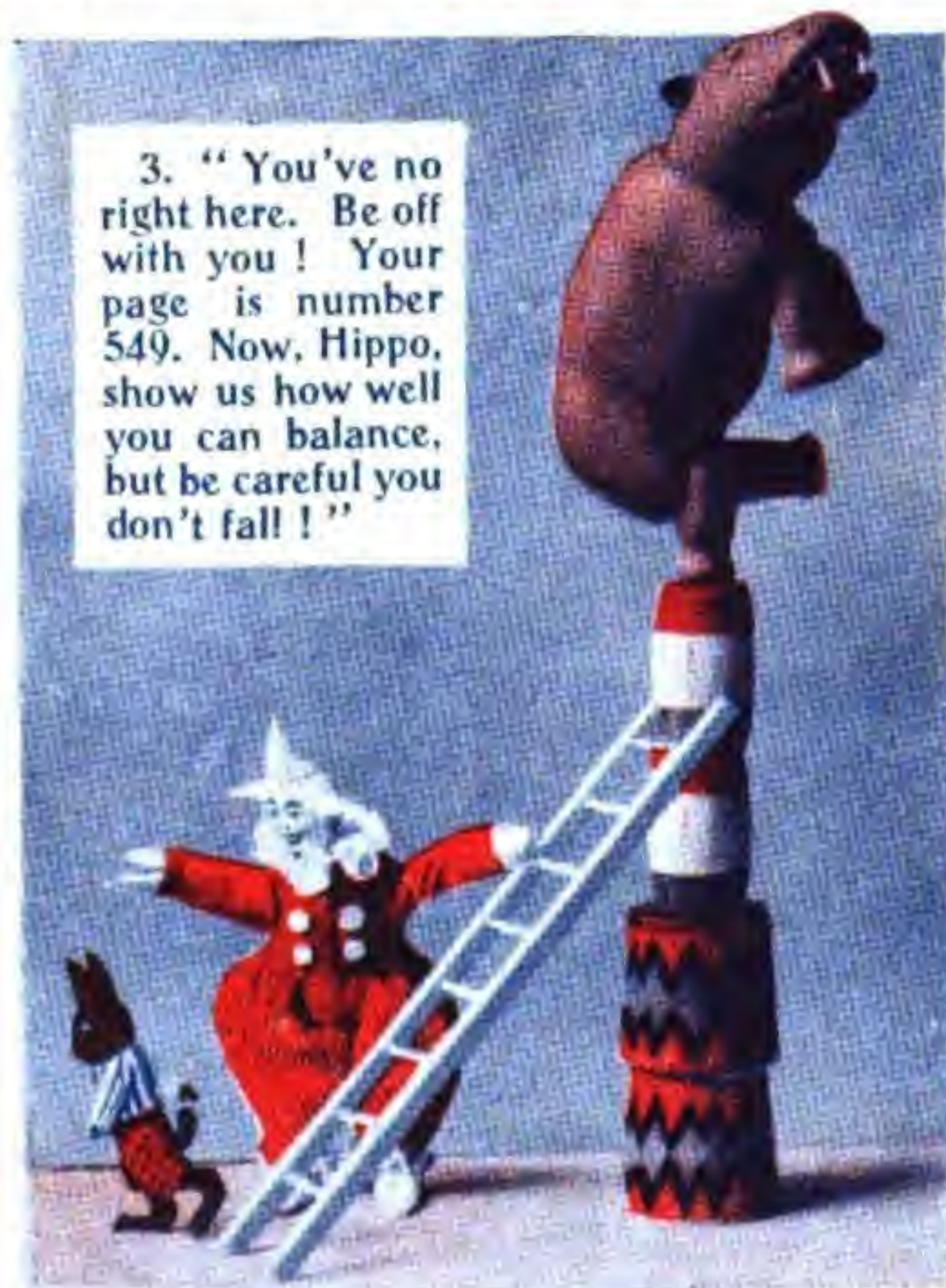
SMILO The Circus Clown



1. "Now, Hippo," said Smilo, "I'm going to make a pile of these tubs for you to balance on. Fetch me another one, please. Thank you."



2. "Now walk up this ladder and stand on the top. Hallo! What are you doing here?" said Smilo to Bertie Bunny, who suddenly appeared.



3. "You've no right here. Be off with you! Your page is number 549. Now, Hippo, show us how well you can balance, but be careful you don't fall!"



4. Then artful Smilo, just to tease poor Hippo, took away the ladder. Wasn't he naughty? But Hippo took a flying leap and—



5.—chased Smilo off, growling horribly and looking dreadfully fierce. And didn't Smilo run! "That leaves this page clear for me—next month," said Mlle. Tip-toe, leading on her beautiful horse, Prince.



THE ADVENTURES OF **BILLY BUNNY** AND HIS FURRY FAMILY

1. The Billy Bunnies were basking by the sea. "I want to go and buy some buns for tea," said Mrs. Bunny to Billy. "You look after the children and see they don't get into mischief."



2. But Billy soon fell fast asleep. "Now's our chance!" cried the naughty children, and shovelled the sand over Billy until he was covered. Then they hid behind the breakwater.



3. Along came Bruin, the old boatman. "Ah," said he, "here's a sand castle some kiddies have made. I'll sit on it and have a rest." "Oh!" said the young Bunnies. "What will happen next?"



4. Then back came Mrs. Bunny. "Have you seen my husband?" she asked Bruin. "What's that, ma'am?" said Bruin. "I'm rather deaf." "Where's my husband?" shouted Mrs. Bunny—



5.—so loud that Billy woke with a start, and sat up so suddenly that old Bruin fell over backwards into a pool of water. Bert and Beatrice popped their heads over the breakwater at that moment and—smack!—each got a good splash of water right in the face. It was Bruin's turn to laugh then, especially when Mrs. Bunny gave him the buns she had bought for the children's tea.

Brave Admiral Bang and his thrilling adventures at sea



1. Admiral Bang, with cat and crew,
Sailed to the Land of Timbuctoo.



2. Where the niggers caught the Admiral brave,
While the crew ran away—their skins to save.



3. Tight to a tree poor Bang was tied.
Thought he : "Am I to be boiled or fried ?"



4. But the Black King said, "You'll stay with me.
Umbrella-bearer you shall be."



5. "Now here's my chance," thought gallant Bang,
And o'er the precipice he sprang.



6. He sailed across the deep blue sea,
And joined his crew in time for tea.

[More adventures of Admiral Bang next month.]

SEPT.

JOLLY TIMES



ALI BABA AT THE CAVE OF THE FORTY THIEVES.

HIDDEN IN THIS PICTURE ARE CASSIM, MRS. ALI BABA, MUSTAPHA, A ROBBER'S SCIMITAR, A JAR OF OIL, AND A BAG OF MONEY. CAN YOU FIND THEM?

SMILO The Circus Clown



1. "What are you doing with my tail and glue?" asked Prince, the prancing steed. "Wait till Smilo comes!" said Grinno.



2. Then Mlle. Tip-toe rode Prince into the ring, with Smilo holding its tail. "Here is Mlle. Tip-toe—who never falls off!" cried Smilo.



3. "See how she balances on one foot while Prince gallops round. (Bother! I have lost my balance. My hand is stuck to Prince's tail!)"



4. "Look how Prince rears upon his hind legs, while Mlle. Tip-toe keeps her seat. (I wish I could keep my feet!)"



5. "Now Prince almost stands on his head, but Mlle. Tip-toe is still graceful. (I can't say the same myself!)"



6. "Pull me off, Grinno! I can't leave go!" Then Grinno pulled! Some of Prince's tail came out, and back fell Grinno with his head in the glue-pot.

Brave Admiral Bang and his thrilling adventures at sea



1. Admiral Bang with crew and puss, While fishing, hooked an octopus.



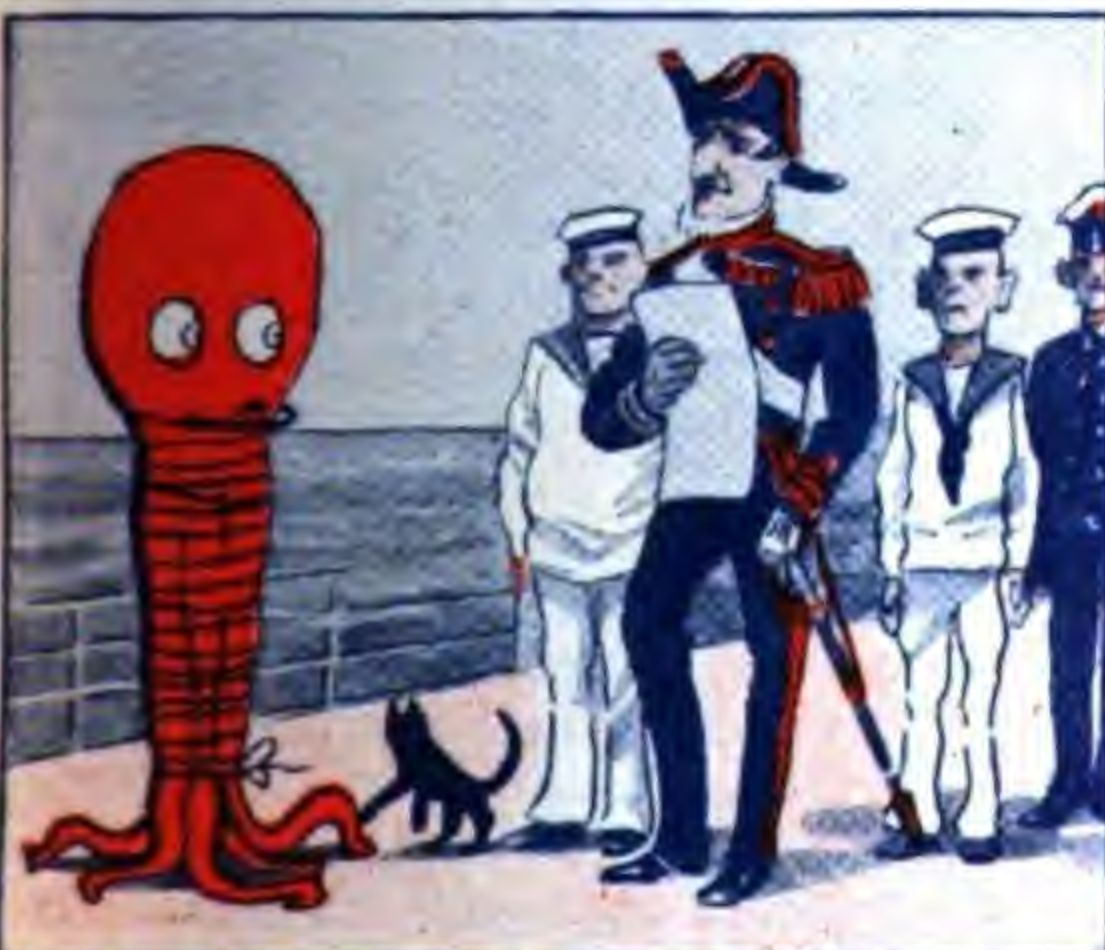
2. But what surprised them worse than that, The creature stole the Admiral's hat !



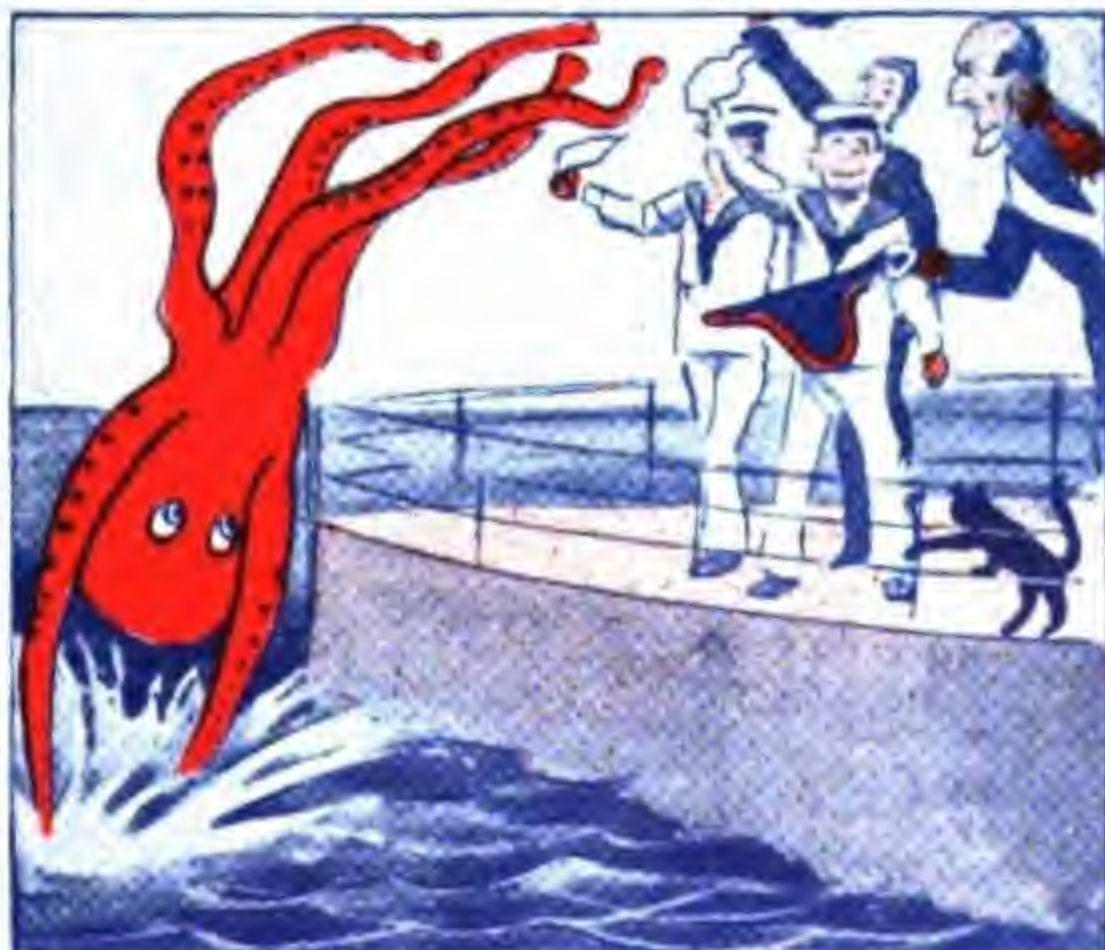
3. The Admiral donned his diving rig, Said he : " That sea-thief out I'll dig."



4. He bound the octopus with cord, And they were then hauled up on board.



5. The creature promised he'd be good, And steal again he never would.



6. They cut the cord and set him free, And back he dived into the sea.

THE ADVENTURES OF **BILLY BUNNY** AND HIS FURRY FAMILY



1. Bert and Beatrice Bunny simply loved the nigger on the shore. "I would like to be one!" sighed Beatrice. "Me too!" said Bert.



2. Then they went for a little stroll along the sands, and came across a pot of Black Paint. "That's the very thing!" gasped Bert.



3. "We *will* be niggers. Hold your head still, Beatrice, while I finish your ears!" And then Beatrice poured the rest of the paint over her brother.



4. Then they ran home. "I'll take Ma's shawl!" said Beatrice. "And I'll have Dad's hat. They'll think we're *real* niggers," laughed Bert.



5. When Mr. and Mrs. Bunny saw Beatrice and Bert with the paint on their clothes they were very cross. "You naughty children!" they cried.



6. What a scrubbing Bert and Beatrice had! Mrs. Bunny thought they never would be clean again. Then they were sent to bed till their clothes dried.

PHILIP
SWINERTON